

**Thai contemporary performing arts and audiences:
contrasting stakeholders and the gaze towards Thainess**

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Declaration

In accordance with University of London requirements, I, Piyawat Thamkulangkool, hereby affirm that this work is my own, except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text.

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Abstract

This investigation uncovered specific constraints that have long affected the development of Thailand's non-mainstream contemporary performing arts and affect its audiences today. Document research on historical records and policy documents was conducted to complement in-depth interviews with non-mainstream contemporary performing arts stakeholders. Focus groups in Bangkok and regional areas of Thailand contributed the opinions of audiences and non-audiences around the country. The findings reveal complex and evolving relationships between 'Thainess' and *farang*-ness form a prominent part of Thailand's modern mythscape, a dynamic field of myths filled with contested ideologies of Thainess. These contestations affect contemporary artists and present many challenges to the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector while concepts of Thainess are more fluid and flexible in terms of economic consumption. These findings suggest that the practices and processes of the Thai contemporary performing arts have generated a complex matrix of Thainess. Different gazes in art appreciation by audience and non-audience and their various views on Thainess affect their evaluation. These phenomena generated tensions between the state and contemporary performing artists over state funding support. While foreign funding appears to be a boon for Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing artists, it does not provide a reliable long-term sustainable basis. Moreover, much of Thai cultural policy focuses on economic values rather than cultural values. National strategies emphasise economic outcomes and are over-concerned about the state ideology of Thainess, and this creates an imbalance in national policy planning that might generate impediments for performing artists and their audiences.

Keywords: Performing arts administration, Cultural policy in Thailand, Theatre gaze, Theatre audience, Thainess, Gaze towards Thainess, Thai contemporary performing arts, Mythscape of Thainess

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Full names
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BACC	Bangkok Art and Culture Centre
BICT Fest	Bangkok International Children's Theatre Festival
BIPAM	Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting
BTF	Bangkok Theatre Festival
BTN	Bangkok Theatre Network
CEA	Creative Economy Agency (Public organisation)
NESDB	National Economics and Social Development Board
NESDP	National Economics and Social Development Plan
OCAC	Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, Thailand
TCEB	Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau
TTF	Thai Theatre Foundation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

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Foreword

This study arises from almost twenty years of work in the contemporary performing arts in Bangkok, Thailand. As a theatre lecturer, theatre practitioner, theatre-goer, and an ordinary Thai-Chinese citizen, the researcher has had multiple associations with the Thai contemporary theatre scene and its audiences. Like elsewhere, Thai theatre audiences and artists regularly engage in mass and social media. In Thailand, media plays a crucial role in publicising social ideologies, ranging from marketing campaigns to state propaganda. Of particular significance is the ‘Thainess’ (*khwaam pen Thai*) concept promoted by the Thai Government through campaigns on radio, television, social media and many forms of public relations and advertisement, as well as through the state education system. These efforts have helped diffuse state ideology into everyday Thai life.

Contemporary theatre in Thailand creates a problem for government-focused notions of Thainess, which centre on old Thai traditions, as it often presents issues and topics seen as ‘foreign’, especially Western, (*farang*, in Thai) as being at odds with preserving old Thai traditions. The contemporary arts sector, especially the performing arts, constantly deals with their paradoxical relationship to Thainess. Their contemporaneity is thus identified as somehow intrinsically western or foreign, and therefore not Thai. Although Thais admire many things in western or foreign culture, when new (contemporary) art forms are compared to old (traditional) forms, the dynamic myth of Thainess and its contrast with foreignness prompts the location of contemporary performance outside the world of Thai performance. In this way, the government-induced notion of Thainess is often unconsciously activated as a standard measurement for assessing what kind of performance is appropriate for Thailand.

The above look at the contemporary performing arts and its ability to represent Thainess reminds the researcher of his own position, born into a Chinese family in Bangkok whose grandparents migrated from China amid the political and economic turmoil of the early 1930s. The researcher’s mother is of the first-generation of a big Chinese family born in Thailand, and his father came directly from China. Unfortunately, because he lost his father at an early age, the story of his father’s ancestors in China is largely unknown. His single mother looked after him and his two siblings, an older sister and an older brother, with support from his mother’s big family. Although part of a Chinese family where most Chinese traditions are still observed, the researcher is unable to speak any of the Chinese dialects used in Thailand (e.g., Teochew and Hokkien¹). He and his siblings studied in Thai schools, but despite growing up half-Thai-half-Chinese he was never confused about his own identity. In his own view, the researcher sees himself as a Thai who belongs to Thailand but

¹ Conventional romanisations for the languages spoken, respectively in the Chaozhou area of northern Guangdong and in southern parts of Fujian province in China (Horpianjaroen, 2015).

was born into a Thai-Chinese family. Receiving a Thai education from kindergarten until his first university degree, 18 years in total, made him into a fully Thai citizen equipped with a standard understanding of Thainess in the Thai national ideology. Despite this embodied sensibility, his place in Thai society is still classified as a half-Thai-half-Chinese, so he is not fully or authentically Thai. This seems that being Thai depends on the family into which one was born. As a Thai citizen with a Thai-Chinese identity, his Chinese mode of being Thai includes an ambivalent form of Thainess.

The researcher's experience of studying at a Thai university also imbued him with social values and an admiration of those with good English language skills. Many subjects taught at university level rely on western texts and were often taught by western-educated Thai lecturers. Surprisingly, this English language skill has sometimes become a stereotype to judge students' ability to study. There is a strong myth in Thai society based on the admiration for the west, so those who are proficient in English are praised or admired as brilliant and seen as capable students or workers. Good English skills often give people who possess them more attention or admiration, both in the general public and among the well-educated Thais. English language skill is seen as linguistic indicator of intelligence in Thai society. Such an admiration of the west or *farang* is crucial to generating this myth.

The myths are based on the admiration of the west and on what Thainess is also affects the contemporary arts in Thailand. These influences form a complex constraint for audiences and artists of the Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector. It shapes their place in Thai arts and culture and in dealing with these conflicts between the myth of Thainess, particularly with regard to the government's perspective, and the myth of western glamour and/or artistic pre-eminence.

Thainess is subjective, relative and not absolute and is tied to a political ideology which seems to have colonised the population. Particularly in the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector, there are huge gaps in terms of academic research in the field of contemporary arts study and audience study in a Thai context. Furthermore, although contemporary performing arts stakeholders have faced the dominant version of Thainess and concepts from state ideology for decades, few academic studies have focused on this conflict and its effects on the contemporary performing arts sector.

Note on translation, romanisation of Thai and referencing

Thai kings and Thai places names in this thesis follow official romanisations, while many other Thai words use the standard romanisation system of the Royal Institute of Thailand (Office of the Royal Society, 1999). Because a few Thai words have used another romanisation in English texts, this

more common romanisation is used rather than that of the Royal Society system. For instance, the word ‘ลิเก’ [li.kei] will retain the common romanisation *likay*, rather the Royal Society’s romanisation as *like* or *likey*. In order to avoid confusing mispronunciations of the English word ‘like’ [laɪk] or ‘key’ [ki:] and to maintain a spelling that follows the closest English pronunciation of the Thai word, the researcher adjusted the romanisation of a few Thai words and consistently used those romanisations in this thesis. Additionally, the spelling of Thai people’s and Thai organisations’ names follows their own preferred English spellings rather than that of the Royal Society romanisation system.

This study follows the British academic norm of referring to authors by their last names when they are cited in the text. In the bibliography, all authors are arranged alphabetically by last names. Nonetheless, when Thai authors are mentioned in the text, their given names and last names will be given at the first instance to help readers who are familiar with Thai norm of given name referencing. In terms of spelling of Thai authors, this study follows their preferred name-spelling in English. The work titles are also given when the research believes that they provide a context to the topics under discussion and that stating the full titles of those works helps readers’ understanding.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research rationale

Research for this dissertation began by exploring non-mainstream contemporary theatre and its audiences in Thailand, primarily in Bangkok, with which the researcher was most familiar. Non-mainstream contemporary performing arts troupes or organisations in Thailand are typically small, self-funded groups formed by artists or members with a strong passion for performing arts forms and for performance-making processes which differ from those of commercial theatre or mainstream entertainment businesses. Some of these groups registered their organisations as foundations, i.e., Makhampom Foundation and Prayoon for Art Foundation, or as a company, i.e. Pichet Klunchun Dance Company, but most of them are publicly recognised but not officially registered. Troupe members typically work as a collective to develop and stage a production, working on a project-by-project basis, with most members holding other jobs to make a living. Some members work as freelancers in TV series or films, others do advertising or event management work, while others teach or obtain a regular income from their office jobs. An annual survey on contemporary theatre makers in Thailand by the Thai Theatre Foundation (TTF) since 2020 indicates that more than 80% of Thai theatre artists do not earn their living from their theatre activities, while over half of the small, medium and large-scale theatres face deficits or losses in some of their projects (TTF, 2024, pp.3-4). This means that Thai non-mainstream productions commonly work on tight budgets, often depending on their own savings or small-scale funding from other sources for each of their projects. They continue to pursue their theatre work by gaining some domestic or international support. The ongoing funding uncertainty of many theatre troupes does not permit them to officially register themselves since registration requires company registration fees and other costs that the troupes cannot afford. A structural problem, highlighted by TTF, is that official criteria for company registration and non-profit organisations in Thailand are not suitable for theatre companies since they require much paperwork, fee and monitoring (2020, p. 5). Because of this situation, few theatre companies register with the government. So, Thailand's many unregistered theatre companies have a public presence on stage but lack official standing in government records. As will be shown below, the gap between the public aesthetic *visibility* and official government *invisibility* of most theatre groups creates a major challenge for the non-mainstream performing arts sector in Thailand. As we will also see, this official invisibility for these performers is nothing new.

Another key element often discussed by artists and performing arts organisations is the role of audiences of the non-mainstream performing arts sector. Finding audiences to fill theatre seats is difficult for many non-mainstream contemporary theatre and dance companies. Many artists and performing arts organisations complain and blame their plight on poor audience knowledge of art

appreciation. Because many performing artists have a limited understanding of ‘audience development’, they often blame the Thai public for its inability to appreciate and understand the arts. Barriers to a shared understanding between performing artists and their audiences also form a major constraint for audience engagement with non-mainstream performing arts in Thailand.

Academic views of performing arts productions are often holistic and stage- or artist-focused, seeing audiences as the ends of an artistic production process or system, whether as art consumers or art recipients. In a Thai context, this problem regarding the growth of audiences is related to a larger and deeper problem rooted in the historical development of the performing arts and their audiences in Thailand’s evolving society and culture. As we shall see, this is tied to Thailand’s uneasy and unstable path to modernity. To discover the sources of the audience growth problem for contemporary performing arts in Thailand today, the researcher needs to examine the roots of audience development. Such an examination will reveal some deep sources that produced the barriers to audience growth for contemporary non-mainstream contemporary theatre and dance companies in Thailand today.

This thesis thus grounds the difficulties of building and increasing audiences for Thai non-mainstream contemporary performances today in a necessary re-examination of deep-rooted sources of the barriers to audience development for this contemporary arts sector in Thailand. Specifically, it will reassess over time the question of ‘*what is Thainess?*’ to show how it is tied to the notion of contemporaneity. Doing so will show how the Thai public is often conflicted in its answers to the question ‘*what is contemporary Thai?*’ because ‘contemporaneity’ is often perceived as something not Thai or un-Thai, in view of its western influences. Such a tension problematises the question ‘*what is Thai contemporary theatre?*’. From this seemingly simple starting point, the researcher produced a multidimension and integrated framework for investigating the many and complex ways that Thainess affects contemporary theatre’s performers, audiences, government and sponsors. Doing so necessitated a historical review and analysis of how the notion of ‘Thainess’ (*khwaam pen thai*) not only affects non-mainstream contemporary performances themselves, but also shapes the views of other stakeholders, i.e. theatre companies or artists as creators, state authorities or funding agencies as supporters, and the attendees or viewers as audiences.

1.2 Keywords and key contexts used in this study

Before commencing this research, the study will introduce some keywords and their key contexts in Thailand. These terms include 1) performing arts and contemporaneity; 2) Thainess (*khwaam pen thai*) and foreignness (*farang-ness*); 3) mythscapes of Thainess; 4) audiences and their gaze; 5) traditional/classical forms versus folk/local form of theatre and dance; 6) *khon* (classical Thai masked

dance drama) and *mohlam* (also spelled *morlam*; a folk musical performance in northeastern Thailand and Laos). Introducing these keywords and their inter-relationships with each other in Thai society clarifies the contexts and the scope of the thesis. Each keyword comprises a piece in conceptual puzzle that influences the others, but together helps to contextualise the current constraints of Thai contemporary performing artists and audiences.

1.2.1 ‘Performing arts’ and ‘Contemporaneity’

‘Performing arts’ has multiple definitions. UNESCO defines ‘performing arts’ as ‘[ranging] from vocal and instrumental music, dance and theatre to pantomime, sung verse and beyond. They include numerous cultural expressions that reflect human creativity and that are also found, to some extent, in many other intangible cultural heritage domains’ (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2023b). Performing arts are thus cultural creations manifested in diverse forms that display human inventiveness. The Oxford Learners’ Dictionary (2023) defines them as ‘arts such as music, dance and drama which are performed for an audience’. From a legal perspective, performing arts ‘means art forms that are expressed by individuals or groups that involve performance through multi-sensory experiences, which performances may include, but need not to be limited to, dance, music, theatre, and digital or electronic production’ (Law Insider, 2023). This latter definition of performing arts is more relevant to this project compared to the first two, since digital or electronic productions and ‘experiences’ (implying audiences) are also mentioned. All the above definitions include a variety of forms, such as theatre, dance and music.

The Thai government’s definition of performing arts from the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC) and the Creative Economy Agency (CEA) categorises performing arts separately from music, including live music.

Table 1: The Thai government’s classifications of contemporary arts and creative industries

The Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC), 2004, p. 19. *****	The Creative Economy Agency (CEA), 2023. *****
The contemporary arts are classified into 9 categories. 1. Visual Art 2. Performing arts (including theatre, plays and applied folk plays) 3. Music (including live music performance) 4. Literature 5. Architecture 6. Interior design 7. Graphic design 8. Film 9. Fashion design	The creative industries in Thailand are categorised into 15 sectors. 1. Craft 2. Performing arts 3. Music (including live music performance) 4. Visual Art 5. Film 6. Broadcasting 7. Publishing 8. Software (Game and animation) 9. Advertising 10. Design 11. Architecture 12. Fashion 13. Thai food 14. Thai traditional medicine 15. Cultural tourism

The term 'performing arts' as used in this study will refer to all varieties of theatre and drama, dance and live shows, including puppetry, stand-up comedy, digital/multimedia performances, circus, cabaret, transgender show etc., but will exclude types of musical performance that focus on musical aspects, such as gigs, concerts, recitals, etc. 'Performing arts' in this study may include performances which may be classified as traditional, modern, contemporary, or any other form influenced by foreign countries.

Although this study will mainly focus on *contemporary* performing arts, in particular the non-mainstream sector, the use of the term 'contemporary' is quite complicated in a Thai context. The English meaning of 'contemporary' (as an adjective) points to either what is 'marked by characteristics of the present period: MODERN, CURRENT' or by what is 'happening, existing, living or coming into being during the same period of time' (Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2023). In aesthetics, 'contemporary art' is explained by the Tate Museum, UK as 'loosely used to refer to art of the present day and of the relatively recent past, of an innovatory or avant-garde nature' (TATE, 2023). This definition of contemporary art highlights art 'of the present' and being innovative or experimental as its key features. There is no universally accepted event or date to mark the start of contemporary art, but it is best understood in relation to various historical and institutional contexts. The Institute of Contemporary Art in London, founded in 1947, focused on showing art from that period, while the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia was founded in 1963 to showcase innovative art from that time, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in New York choosing to show art from 1977 and 'in the 1980s, the Tate planned a Museum of Contemporary Art in which contemporary art was defined as art of the past ten years on a rolling basis' (ibid.). In Thailand, 'contemporary art' for the OCAC of the Ministry of Culture as of 2004 included three types, as shown below.

1. Art that is developed or created in the same period or at the same time and happens in the present. Culture serves as the foundation or source of creation.

2. A new artistic expression based on the paradigm or context of current culture and society.

3. A new creation of art emerges from thought and integrated application that connects to and interacts with art and culture to benefit recent society (2004, p.2).

The former Director-General of OCAC, Dr. Apinan Poshyananda points out that ‘contemporary or contemporaneity can be defined as part of the present but, at the same time, it can be seen as deriving from traditional heritage as well. Therefore, the contemporary heritage – which may be a contradiction in terms – should not be overlooked in terms of resources’ (Poshyananda, 2005, p.95). Although the character of ‘contemporary art’ in the OCAC definition above is quite broad and vague, it implies that an official state’s attitude on contemporaneity depends on what is of *the recent time* and what emphasises Thai ‘traditional heritage’. Therefore, the OCAC seems to consider contemporary arts as needing to balance what is *new* or *created now* with what is recognised as ‘contemporary Thai heritage’, namely arts that connect to Thai traditions, which should also be considered as contemporary. This points to a tension in the Thai government that includes artistic contemporaneity like the OCAC, as well as an awareness of Thainess. The sense of a national cultural identity permeates these art forms, with the state continually reminding Thais that they should not forget the Thai roots. This implies that ‘Thai’ contemporaneity continues to a hybrid or viral challenge to ‘Thai’ traditions, which are often portrayed as having a purer ‘Thai’ cultural DNA.

In short, ‘contemporary performing arts’ as used in this study will loosely follow the three criteria of the government OCAC agency mentioned above, as well as emphasising a third criterion, a means of benefiting Thai society as it is the case now.

1.2.2 ‘Thainess’ (*khwaṃ pen thai*) or Thai identity and Foreignness (*khwaṃ pen farang*)

What needs to be recognised as Thainess (*khwaṃ pen thai*) or Thai identity is a contentious topic in Thai studies. Scholars in political science, anthropology, sociology and Thai history have long debated how Thainess may be defined, but no clear and agreed resolution has been identified. It is normally seen to concern itself with political ideology tied to nationalism and thus the relationship between Thainess and nationalism will be discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1 with regard to the formation of a ‘gaze’ on Thainess. Consequently, this thesis considers Thainess broadly, as both a collective and an individual notion.

Thainess is often contrasted in a binary fashion with the term *farang* or western foreignness. The latter term became more accepted with the work of Yule and Burnell (1903, pp. 269-270) and is explained in the Hobson-Jobson dictionary as being derived from the ethnonym ‘*Firinghee*’ which originates in Farsi (Persian) as *Farangi* and in Arabic as *Al-Faranj*, *Ifranji* or *Firanji* (Harrison, 2010a, p.2). The Farsi term ‘*Farangi*’ refers to a Germanic people known as the Franks who lived in the lower Rhine area in the Roman and early medieval eras and who eventually became known as the French (Britannica, 2024). The Thai word *farang* ‘was borrowed from Muslim Persian and Indian traders during the period, when it was used to refer to the Portuguese, who were the first Europeans to visit Siam in significant numbers’ (Kitiarsa, 2010, p.61). The term *farang* means everything

belonging to White foreigners or westerners, whatever their ethnicity or national origins. During the western imperialist 19th century heyday in Asia, what was seen by the Thais 'the *farang* menace' had entered Siam and thus the attitude towards *farang* culture has also been characterised as a danger to Thai nationalism (Chachavalpongpun, 2005, p.2). After centuries of interaction with the west and westerners, a new contemporary Thai understanding of *farang* has emerged, shaped by western involvement in Asia, and the term has evolved over time. Because of the historical layering of divergent sentiments toward *farang* in various eras, current meanings are complex and ambiguous. For Kitiarsa, *farang* is 'an expression of Siamese/Thai Occidentalism, that is, a historically and culturally constructed way of knowing, dealing with, criticizing, condemning, consuming and imagining the West as a powerful and suspicious Other' (2010, p. 58). He further argues that 'from whatever angle Thainess is now viewed, *farang* influences are simply inevitable, and contemporary forms of Thainess are incomplete without the allure of *farang*-ness' (ibid., p. 73). In other words, *farang* and Thai are co-produced mirror images that have hybridised each other through complex processes of cultural negotiation.

Based on that background, this thesis will use the Thai term *farang* (as a noun) for a 'white-skinned foreigner' (Herzfeld, 2010, p.173) or Caucasian or western people (westerners), and western-derived things, ideas, practices, and western-ness in general, regardless of its ethnic or national origins. Since the word *farang* is often used as an adjective meaning 'western', a *farang* style generally means a 'western' style. These meanings of *farang* have long been used among Thais in everyday life, so this study will also use *farang* in these senses. Importantly, *farang* is also often paired with 'Thainess' as a conceptual binary.

1.2.3 'Mythscape of Thainess'

The phrase '*mythscape*' of Thainess in this thesis uses Duncan S. A. Bell's concept of 'mythscape' in nationalism as 'the temporally and spatially extended discursive realm in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, negotiated, and reconstructed constantly'. (2003, p. 63). The myths emerging in this discursive realm help to constitute the nation, in Benedict Anderson's sense that 'the nation is an 'imagined community'. The political expression and nationalism in Thailand 'arouses deep attachments to the nation, an imagined community of people who supposedly share the same ethnicity, language and culture' (Witayasakpan, 1992, p. 333). The suffix '-scape' (taken from the common term 'land-scape') preceded by 'myth' draws on Arjun Appadurai's use of '-scape' for the shared areas of cultural movement and interaction that Anderson's 'imagined community' works since, as an 'imagined world, the world that is constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups' (1999, p. 222). Its 'deeply perspectival constructs, inflected very much by historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actor: nation states, multinationals,

diasporic communities, as well as sub-national groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighbourhoods and families. Indeed, the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscape' (ibid., pp. 221-222). As such, a mythscape functions as 'cultural sacralisation of the past viewed and remembered through nostalgic and romantic lenses put on to enhance national pride and popular celebration of the country and the spirit of its people' (Rojas, 2013, p. 23). Mythscapes form the basis of national identity-making by depicting a collective memory, myths and offer an understanding of 'who we are and how we see ourselves' and sometimes critiquing 'who we are not' (ibid.).

1.2.4 'Audience' and 'Gaze'

Defining an audience is also difficult, given its many definitions and diverse meanings and multiple contexts (Hill et al, 2018). Generally, 'audience' refers to the 'people, considered as a group, who watch or listen to a performance, movie, public event, etc., either together in one place or separately' (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023a). The Arts Council England includes 'visitors, readers, listeners, viewers, participants, learners, users of a product, and people who buy works of art and publications' as audience (2018, p.3). The notion of audience in media studies, for Sturken and Cartwright 'is a collective of lookers', while 'a viewer is an individual who looks' (2009, p. 49).

In focusing on the contemporary performing arts in Thailand, the notion of audience will include a viewer's individual perception of their activity. In other words, while watching a performance in a playhouse, an audience member is simultaneously part of collective of onlookers and an individual viewer of the performance. Hence, the notion of audience in this research refers to the performing arts viewer, in the Thai general public, the one who attends live contemporary performing arts events, particularly in the non-mainstream sector, i.e., theatre, musicals, spoken plays, stand-up comedy, cabaret, drag show or any forms of contemporary performance. This study divides informants into two categories: viewers of contemporary performing arts, who will be called the *audience group* or *audience* and the public who lacks experience watching contemporary performing arts, who will be called the *non-audience group* or *non-audience*.

This study also notes that the notion of 'gaze' has three key meanings. Firstly, 'gaze' means 'to look at something or someone for a long time, especially in surprise or admiration, or because you are thinking about something else'. A second definition of 'gaze' is 'a long look, usually of particular kind' such as 'steady gaze, admiring gaze'. The third meaning is 'the fact of looking at or considering someone or something in a particular way, or from a particular point of view', for example, 'critical gaze, satirical gaze and female gaze' (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023b). From these meanings, this study will define *gaze* in two perspectives: first, gaze refers to a process of *practicing* arts appreciation, based on Pierre Bourdieu's and Heather Maitland's notion of gaze (as

further discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1), and secondly, gaze refers to the battleground for the self to identify and re-identify itself while being involved in psychological power relationships tied to the gaze of Thainess. The latter meaning highlights how Thais consider and process the essence of Thainess through their mental filtering and mode of making meaning for the objects or performances which they are viewing (more discussion in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2).

In addition, because artistic production differs from audience reception, the gaze of the creator often differs from the gaze of the audience. Audiences often do not see what the creator hoped they would see, but something else. The director or performers think they are doing X, but the audiences see and understand this as Y. Creators and performers see something different from viewers. While the director may say 'I showed X', a member of audience may say 'I saw Y, which is not the X you said you showed!' This gap arises from two different gazes, that of the maker and that of the receiver.

1.2.5 Traditional/Classical form versus Folk/Local form of theatre and dance

Thai performing arts in pre-modern Thailand are often divided into two main types: court performances and popular performances (popular traditional theatre/ folk theatre), some of which were commercial (Rutnin, 2012; Witayasakpan, 1992). Courtiers, such as retainers or lesser members of the royal entourage, performed court dance to entertain the King, royal families and to perform ceremonial functions. Classical performances included male dancers performing *khon*, masked dance-drama, while female dancers performed *lakhon*, a dance-drama or theatre which, when performed in the royal court, is called *lakhon nai* or inner court theatre. Since the late nineteenth century, performing arts in Siam transformed and diversified, with a range of new forms that mixed and modified court and non-court forms and the creation of new hybrid forms (Koanantakool, 2002). In the two decades after the 1932 end of absolute monarchy, court forms became part a new government office known as the Fine Arts Department which became the source of what this study calls 'Thai traditional/classical theatre'.

Along with these developments, private or commercial theatres or popular traditional theatre troupes included groups of performers/dancers, including folk or local performers, who were hired to perform as part of local rituals and entertainments, such as cremation ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, votive offering rites and temple celebrations. Many of the private troupes were run like a family business whose members are related by consanguinity or marriage (Koanantakool, 2002). Their varied performance repertoires often included a range of forms of indigenous theatre targeting commoners in urban or rural areas. Among them were: *lakhon nok* (outer court theatre), *likay* (a popular form of melodramatic musical theatre), *lamtat* (verse singing battle performance), *lakhon chatri* (old folk dance-drama, mixed with *lakhon* elements), *mohlam* (Isan or northeastern popular musical theatre), *Nora* (southern ritual song and dance theatre), *nang talung* (small shadow puppet

of the south) (see Glossary for further types of performance genre). This study refers to the popular as opposed to the court versions as 'Thai folk/local theatre'. For this study, the existence and positioning of traditional performing arts forms (classical theatre forms) and folk or local theatre forms (indigenous theatre form) in Thai society are crucial in the understanding of the current Thai theatre landscape.

1.2.6 'khon' and 'mohlam; morlam'

The *khon*, masked dance or masked dance-drama, is a Thai classical form of performance, normally presenting a story taken from various episodes in the *Ramakian* (Brandon, 1967; Rutnin, 2012), the Thai version of Ramayana. The epic tells of the adventures of the exiled king Rama, 'the hero and incarnation of the god Vishnu, who brings order and justice to the world. On one level, *khon* represents high art cultivated by the Siamese/Thai courts over centuries, while at another level, as a dramatic performance, it can be interpreted and enjoyed by spectators from different social backgrounds' (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2023a).

Figure 1: Photo of khon:

Photo of Masked Dance Drama (khon), showing the highpoint of most performances, the battle between Rama and his army of monkey soldiers (left) and the demon-giant Thotsakan and his demon army (right).



Courtesy of Department of Cultural Promotion, 2022

In 2018, 'khon, Masked Dance Drama in Thailand' was officially added to the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity by UNESCO. *Khon* is a national symbol of elegant and refined classical performance. There are many different *khon* performances transmitted and staged in Thailand, but since 2007 an important new royally-supported *khon* performance program under the royal patronage of HM Queen Sirikit the Queen Mother's SUPPORT Foundation has become one of the most successful annual national events. The SUPPORT Foundation has been staging

royal *khon* performance in '*khon luang*' or *khon* in the royal court style for national audiences in Bangkok. It aims to pass on this exquisite Thai art form to the next generation by integrating many elements such as newly made intricate and detailed Thai traditional costume based on old designs, large spectacular special effects and thrilling stage sets and techniques involving large *khon* casts (The Nation Thailand, 2022). Given its prime benefactor, it is generally known as the Queen's *khon* or *khon somdej* (Tourism Authority of Thailand Newsroom, 2023).

A popular form of lively folk singing and performance based in northeastern Thailand (Isan) and Laos, is officially romanised as '*mohlam*' but is also spelled as *morlam* (Brandon, 1967). Strongly identified with Isan cultural life, *mohlam* performances take a form of storytelling by traditional folk singing accompanied by the music of an Isan bamboo wind instrument known as a *khaen* (Dolphen, 2016, p. 58). While still performed for ritual healing in local communities, the best known version of today's *mohlam* performances has been adapted and modernised for large musical stage performances. *Mohlam* troupes modify their styles of performance to suit local tastes, drawing large Isan audiences for multi-hour performances lasting from night to the morning.

Figure 2: Photo of a contemporary mohlam performance by the Rabiab Wathasilpa troupe.



Courtesy of Anan P. (Thairath Online, 2023)

There are many kinds of *mohlam* but this study will focus on *mohlam moo* or *mohlam rueang tor klon*, currently the most popular form, a type of folk singing and dancing. Shows start around 9 p.m. and go on until 6 a.m. the next morning and include seven parts (Thipmanee, 2022) performed in sequence as entertainments for the whole night. One of the most popular *mohlam* troupes in this type is the Rabiab Wathasilpa Troupe established in 1964 in Khon Kaen province (ibid.) and has remained popular until today using its Khon Kean dialect singing. The troupe has more than 300 members and its touring season lasts around 9 to 10 months each year with a break during the Buddhist period known as *Khao Phansa* between a lunar cycle of three months (July to October)

involving prayer and various forms of abstinence. The Rabiab Wathasilpa Troupe tours all over the country, where it finds many willing customers among the many Isan people who have migrated as workers to all parts of Thailand. In the first quarter of 2024, it has performed almost every day from 1st of January to 30th April 2024 (Rabiab Wathasilpa fanpage, 2024).

The two theatrical genres of *khon* and *mohlam* are used to represent traditional or classical theatre and folk or local popular performance in focus group discussions.

The keywords discussed above comprise the key terms used in this research, which when seen as a set of interrelated concepts, help to provide a context and framework for the arguments raised in of this study. The next section presents the landscape of contemporary performing arts in Thailand as a background for understanding the Thai contemporary performing arts sector.

1.3 Background: Thailand and its landscape of contemporary performing arts

Thailand, known as Siam until 1939, is a Southeast Asian country in the middle of the Indo-Chinese peninsula. It borders the modern countries of Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia. The total area of Thailand is about 513,000 square kilometres, roughly the same size as France or Spain, and a bit smaller than the U.S. state of California. It is now commonly divided into four regions: Central, Northern, North-Eastern, and Southern. Bangkok or *krung thep maha nakhon* (meaning ‘the great city of angels’ in Thai) has been the official capital city of Thailand since 1782, following the destruction of the original Thai capital of Ayutthaya by the Burmese (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Data Centre, 2013). Thailand’s total population in 2018 was 66.4 million with 5.67 million (or 8.5%) people living in Bangkok (National Statistical Office, 2018). Buddhism is the most widely practised religion of Thailand, and a large majority of the population, 93.5%, are Buddhists (National Statistical Office, 2014).

Siam became Thailand, meaning ‘the land of the free’, in June 1939, according to the government gazette no. 56, page 810, on 24 June 2482, B.E. (1939 A.D.). The government head at the time, Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, announced that the official name of the country was ‘Thailand or *prathet thai (Thai Nation)*’ and that the nationality of its people would henceforth be ‘Thai or *khon thai*’ (Komolpelin, 2020). Thai people nowadays, as citizens of Thailand, call themselves ‘Thai’ and learn a standard ‘Thai’ language dialect, become familiar with ‘Thai’ culture, largely through their schooling and engagement with national mass media. Much has changed in Thailand since 1939, but key aspects of the constituents of ‘Thai’ political, cultural, and linguistic identity, which evolved earlier over many centuries, remain recognisable (Wyatt, 2003).

1.3.1 Milestones of contemporary performing arts in Thailand

Contemporary Thai performing arts may be dated to the introduction of modern western theatre in the 1960s often involving the work of overseas-educated English language teachers at the universities of Chulalongkorn and Thammasat in Bangkok. Pornrat Damrhung states that ‘the movement to create modern theatres which became the foundation of today’s performing arts was born in the university’ (2017, p. 126). Chulalongkorn University set up Thailand’s first Department of Dramatic Arts in its Faculty of Arts in 1966, with Thammasat University’s Drama Department being founded in 1978; between 1968 and 1976, modern theatre pieces became popular amongst university students. Besides translating, adapting, producing, and publishing of play scripts by world-famous playwrights, many new writings and theatre works were also created and presented to the public. Theatre emerged as an intellectual and critical form of art in touch with currents in the wider world and influenced by education overseas, especially in the US, but also in Europe. Performances were often held in classrooms or auditoriums and most audiences were university students. ‘Universities were the incubators of artists, academics, actors, directors, playwrights, script writers, stage designers and technicians’ (ibid., p. 126). In the following decades, mainstage productions from the previously mentioned universities and other departments teaching drama in other universities have launched a wide range of productions to public audiences, introducing via translation and adaptation a wide range of modern European and American plays that span realism to Brechtian Epic theatre to the theatre of the absurd and the anti-theatrical. Pawit Mahasarinand highlights ‘notable examples are *Khawmtai Khong Salesman* (Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*) and *Raeng Loki* (O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms*) in the 1970s; *Nimit Maya* (Strindberg’s *A Dream Play*) and *Maekha Songkhram* (Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children*) in the 1980s; *Achan Kha* (Mamet’s *Oleanna*) and *Khothot Thi Kuan Prasat* (Handke’s *Offending the Audience*) in the 1990s; and *Khoi Godot* (Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*) and *Wai Fai* (Wedekind’s *Spring Awakening*) in the 2000s’ (2016, pp. 926-927).

University-level drama and performances nurtured a new generation of students who were more concerned about social and political problems and who sought to improve Thai society, notably students from major Thai universities like Thammasat, Chulalongkorn, Silpakorn, and Chiangmai. University students there translated and adapted many European and American plays and wrote original Thai modern spoken plays using western (European and American) dramatic methods. Students had become more prolific than those at the turn of the century, making use of theatre as a medium of free expression – ‘neither controlled nor censored like newspapers, radio and television – in their political demonstrations against military governments from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s’ (ibid., p. 929). Two pivotal student-centred political moments – one on 14th October 1973 and a second on 6th October 1976 – occurred as students protested against military dictatorship. These

moments deeply affected Thai classical dance-drama, which students often criticised for representing class division, the military, monarchy, and political elites, as Mattani Rutnin points out, 'Thai classical dance-drama, along with other arts and literature of aristocratic origins, were attacked by leftists as being products of a decadent aristocracy and instruments of the monarchy to glorify its own institution and corrupt the minds of the people' (2012, p.230). Those moments comprised a new intellectual and aesthetic generation in Thailand who explored new types of theatre work aside from Thai classical arts which they saw as exclusive, elite and reinforcing inequalities in Thai society.

Theatre activities in the first decade consisted of western trained English speaking theatre teachers and university students who mainly followed western training and models but created plays to reflect the conditions of life and to reflect social and political problems. As Mahasarinand argues, 'apart from staging many translations and adaptations of existentialist and absurdist plays by Beckett, Pinter, Albee and Ionesco as a reaction against...the Thai military government, university students in this period wrote and performed a lot of political plays to voice their comments on politics and society, oftentimes not in conventional theatre spaces' (2016, pp. 929-930). Kamron Khunadilok is a crucial pioneer here. Starting from the Literary Arts Club at Thammasat University, groups of progressive students, whether from Thammasat or elsewhere, sought to read and write progressive works to reflect the many problems in Thai society at that time. Plays became a vehicle through which they could deliver their critical or progressive messages to contemporary society. They formed the Crescent Moon Theatre (Phra Chan Siaw) in 1973 which staged dozens of original plays between 1973 and 1976 (Jungwiwattanaporn, 1999, p. 7). With the political crisis of 6th October 1976, many university students and civilians who opposed the restoration of previous dictators left the scene because they had died or due to their banishment (ibid., p.9). This led to the disbanding of political theatres as many student leaders had to escape to remote rural areas or seek political asylum in other countries. Even Kamron lived in political asylum in France for decades (Crescent Moon Theatre, 2009) only returning two decades later to Thailand to restart and lead the new Crescent Moon Theatre from 1996.

The theatre for young people and Theatre in Education movement in Thailand also started in the 1970s. One centre was in the Department of Dramatic Arts at Chulalongkorn University, which launched a Children's Drama (Theatre for young people) and Theatre in Education curriculum in 1974, headed by Onchuma Yuthavong. At Thammasat University the Theatre for Children course was started at Drama Department, Faculty of Liberal Arts in 1979 by Wandee Lympiwattana. Onchuma also oversaw the Hoon Hansa (Joyful Puppet) as a successful TV programme for children on Channel 4 which was broadcast between 1977 and 1982. Through mainstream mass media, children's theatre became a model of how to connect young people to theatre and the concept of

creative drama, and spread the practice of drama education and theatre for children to many people outside of Bangkok (Damrhung, 1998).

In the 1980s, new mobile theatre troupes were established by groups of young social activists, such as the Makhampom Theatre Group (1980 to present) and MAYA: The Art and Cultural Institute for Development (1981-2020). These organisations integrated simple forms of presentation such as puppetry and storytelling to raise social issues to diverse publics. This led to many new mobile theatre productions for touring both in urban and remote rural areas, including not only school tours but also outreach performances in local communities and slum areas of Bangkok. In later decades, more children's theatre troupes were set up, such as Krajidrid, Krajok Ngao, Caravan, which created a range of educational theatre projects concerned with specific social issues, including sex education for young people, drug addiction and AIDS, touring specific places like schools, slum areas or local youth centres (ibid.). Furthermore, for almost four decades, MAYA: The Art and Cultural Institute for Development worked with primary schools across the country through teacher workshops by integrating theatre techniques, namely puppetry, storytelling and creative drama, as tools for creating a positive learning environment. MAYA also developed its own teaching planning technique, called EAP or Experiential Activities Planner (Mukda, 2020) which employed the drama process as a key exploration for any teaching topic, including mathematics, sciences, language and social skills learning. While these volunteer theatre troupes adapted some forms of traditional Thai theatre like Thai dance, *likay*, or folk theatre techniques in their production to connect with local audiences, overall, for the most part 'the ideas and practices of "creative dramatics" and "children's theatre" were inspired by Western countries' (Damrhung, 1998, p. 12).

In the 1985, the critically acclaimed theatre group, Theatre 28, was established by Thammasat and Chulalongkorn University alumni to present sophisticated and thought-provoking western plays to audiences. They produced exciting productions from world-renowned playwrights like Brecht, Kafka, Durrenmett, Ionesco, Wasserman and Fritsch. Most of their audiences were university students and university graduates or overseas educated theatregoers, a somewhat limited audience. Theatre 28 disbanded in the mid-1990s.

In a new development, initiated by practitioners and famous television and movie actors, a group of middle-class audiences emerged in this economic boom period. Willing to pay money for high-quality commercial entertainment, they flocked to late-night plays at Monthienthong Theatre, a 150-seat cocktail lounge at the four-star Montien Hotel on Silom Road in Bangkok. Middle class audiences enjoyed original Thai plays and translations, as well as adaptations of European and American plays like *Arms and the Man* (George Bernard Shaw), *Blithe Spirit* (Noël Coward), *The Boys in the Band* (Mart Crowley) (Mahasarinand, 2016).

In 1987, a new Thailand Cultural Centre was founded with a grant from the Japanese government which aimed to strengthen diplomatic relationships with the Thai government and to celebrate the diamond jubilee of King Rama IX's birthday (Ministry of Culture, n.d.). The venue consisted of a grand auditorium, a small auditorium and an outdoor stage, and became a leading venue with modern facilities in Thailand. Many concerts and theatre productions were launched. This venue was originally the responsibility of the Office of the National Culture Commission, Ministry of Education but is now under the Department of Cultural Promotion, Ministry of Culture.

Dass Entertainment was a booming commercial theatre company in the 1990s. It built the Bangkok Playhouse, a 600-seat proscenium theatre, in 1994, aiming to make contemporary theatre more accessible to new audiences (Visiting Arts, 2002). To support these theatre productions, Dass Entertainment also produced TV shows, and 7 to 10 stage productions each year ranged from original plays to western plays (Jungwiwattanaporn, 1999, p. 13). Despite changing the company's name to Dream Box, the team is still operated by the same staff with the Bangkok Playhouse refurbished and renamed as M Theatre.

The Patravadi Theatre was founded in 1992 as the first open-air theatre in Bangkok staging modern productions on the Chao Phraya River. The founder, Patravadi Mejudhon, is one of the most influential performing artists, promoters and patrons of Thailand's fledgling contemporary Thai theatre scene. Her theatre showcased experimental drama and dance with local and foreign talent, and its Bangkok Fringe Festival, started in 1999, was a major annual platform for contemporary theatre in both domestic and international productions.

During the 1990s, other professional venues emerged, such as Sala Chalerkrung (restored in 1993), Chiang Mai's Kad Suan Khaew (KAD) Performing Arts Centre (1995), Mayabox: the alternative theatrical space (1996), New National Theatre in Suphanburi (2000) and Nakhon Ratchasima (2001). The Asian Financial Crisis that began in Bangkok on 2nd July 1997 had a huge impact on the Thai and regional economies and affected all cultural activities, including theatre. Rather than stopping theatre, it helped give rise to many small non-mainstream modern theatre groups, often started by theatre lecturers or new university graduates, such as Moradok Mai Group, Saosoong Theatre Group, B-floor theatre, Flower of Love Entertainment, 8x8 Theatre Group, Bluebox Theatre Group, Dream Masks Group (which changed its name to Naked Masks Network in 2004) and Life Theatre. Despite being small, self-funded groups in often challenging economic times, they all regularly produced small new works for the public. An important new organisation to coordinate these new groups appeared in 2002 with the founding of the Bangkok Theatre Network (BTN), which sought to find ways for theatre to empower society. The network now includes nearly 60 member groups, ranging from non-profit theatre groups to new theatre groups to university students' theatre groups and drama or performing arts clubs. A highlight of the BTN is the annual

Bangkok Theatre Festival (BTF), now held in November of each year at the Bangkok Arts and Culture Centre (BACC) and used as an event for BTN members to present their works.

There has also been a new movement in the commercial entertainment sector designed to attract foreign tourists. This sector ranges from transgender² cabarets like Tiffany's Show Pattaya (since 1980), the Alcazar cabaret Pattaya (since 1981) and Calypso Bangkok (since 1988) to major cultural show extravaganzas such as Phuket FantaSea on Phuket Island (since 1999), Thai Alangkarn Theatre Pattaya (since 2004), Siam Niramit (since 2006), and Muai Thai Live. The performances also include The Legend Lives, a martial arts show (since 2014) and Singha d'luck Cinematic Theatre 'Kaan Show' (since 2017), and the venues and styles of performance mixing Thai traditional styles along with western ones. They offer packages of entertaining performances including pre-show dinner and serve as places for tourists to enjoy Thai culture. These tourist-orientated forms of entertainment have created new jobs for traditional Thai performers, technicians, and stage crews.

In addition, the huge Muang Thai Rachadalai Theatre was launched in 2007 with a 1495-seat proscenium stage in a Bangkok shopping mall as a commercial theatre, funded by Scenerio, a large television production company (Mahasarinand, 2016). The theatre does not only produce new original productions from famous Thai novels or stories, often in a spectacular musical form and a simple and familiar plot, but also imports Broadway productions, which included buying the copyright of Broadway musicals such as La Cage aux Folies to produce Thai versions. Using lucrative marketing strategies and casting famous singers, television and film stars to attract their fans has enabled the shows to raise ticket prices to help grow audiences. It seems that a new cultural trend has emerged for urban middle- to upper-class audiences to watch a commercially standardised show with pricy tickets.

The last decade has seen the formation of many new contemporary theatre and dance companies. Pichet Klunchun, a solo dance artist and choreographer, set up his Pichet Klunchun Dance Company 'around 2011 (previously called LifeWork company, a subtle but clear signal of Klunchun's dogged dedication to his work)' (Esplanade, 2020). He has created many cutting-edge productions with his unique style of Thai contemporary dance work, integrating Thai classical dance and contemporary western dance techniques. His company aims to establish a professional standard of dance training and offer his dancers a reasonable living wage. The veteran modern dancer, Jitti Chompee, founded his 18 Monkeys Dance Theatre company in 2010 to create contemporary dance by integrating multidisciplinary approaches (Chompee, 2022). Jitti also directs the Unfolding Kafka Festival, established as a biennial international contemporary dance festival in 2015, with international co-

² In Thailand, transgender *kathoe*y (in Thai means transgender or transsexual males) is sometimes called Ladyboy (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). Transgender Cabaret is a cabaret where all the cast members are transgender males.

operation from the Goethe-Institut Thailand, the Japan Foundation, the Embassy of France and the Embassy of Israel (ibid.). This festival works as a Thai contemporary arts organisation that tailors projects to match the funding policies of foreign agencies. These fundings are normally a part of those foreign agencies' strategy of cultural diplomacy to promote their culture in Thailand.

The Thai government has come to recognise work in contemporary theatre among other arts, with the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture launching the Silapathorn Award in 2004. The government recognises seven Thai mid-career (aged between 30 and 55 years) contemporary artists from seven art fields (visual arts, literature, music, film and motion arts, performing arts, design arts, and architecture) who have shown a significant contribution to Thai arts and culture. The award includes an official honorary brooch and a one-time cash prize of 100,000 baht (approximately £2,150) (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2019). In addition, the Thailand Centre of the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC) formed in 2011 and has been promoting commendable theatre works and artists with its annual ITCA-Thailand award since 2013 (Mahasarinand, 2016) with winners receiving an ITCA-Thailand honorary plate.

Performers need places to perform, and since 2000, many new contemporary arts spaces and alternative theatre venues have been established in urban areas like Bangkok and Chiang Mai. These include the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (2005³), which receives public funding from the Bangkok Metropolitan Office, along with the Sodsai Pantomkomol Centre for Dramatic Arts at Chulalongkorn University (2011) and commercial venues like K-bank Siam Pic-Ganesha Theatre (2015). Many privately funded alternative arts spaces were also set up, including Democrazy Theatre Studio (2009), Creative Industries (2014), Bangkok CityCity Gallery (2015), Thonglor Art Space (2015), Syrup the Space (2015) (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2014), Mayarith Theatre (2015), MAIIAM Contemporary Arts Museum (2016), Buffalo Bridge Gallery (2016), Sliding Elbow Studio (2018), Dhepsiri Creative Space (2020), Act It House By Louise (2021), and others. These small spaces have experimented with diverse cutting-edge arts programmes and interdisciplinary activities, including domestic productions and international collaborative projects produced by veteran and new artists. Most funding comes from the troupe's own sources, fundraising events, and work on a project-by-project basis, often with support from foreign arts and cultural agencies.

Although many new theatre groups and alternative arts spaces, both in the mainstream and non-mainstream sectors, have proliferated in urban areas and play a significant role in Thailand's contemporary arts scene, stability for theatre groups, spaces, and individual theatre careers is still problematic, with Mahasarinand, founder of the IATC arguing that

³ The year given after the venue indicates the year of establishment.

While it is a fact that one cannot work professionally and solely as a modern theatre artist in Thailand, most drama school graduates have applied their theatrical skills to the television, advertising and movie industries. Nonetheless, some of them have taken time off from their regular work to form theatre troupes and from time to time staged productions (2016, p. 930).

This view echoes the real situation faced by many contemporary theatre practitioners in Thailand. Universities have trained theatre practitioners in various fields (Damrhung, 2017), many of whom become talented workers in mainstream media and entertainment businesses. They can more easily earn an economically secure living, while non-mainstream contemporary theatres and practitioners face a persistently precarious existence. Opposing mainstream priorities means pursuing ideals that seek to make performances for aesthetic and socio-political purposes as opposed to profit alone.

1.3.2 Contemporary theatre under the military government since 2014

Apart from the issue about non-mainstream artists' ideologies on pursuing their passion in performing arts making in the previous section, the remarkable movement of non-mainstream contemporary artists in the recent decade is an expression of new generations on contemporary social ideologies. The latest (of thirteen) Thai military coups occurred in May 2014, when General Prayut Chan-o-cha, the commander of the Royal Thai Army, replaced the previous government and oversaw a new constitution for a self-selected, largely military-led government, which included no government elections until May 2023. Between 2014 and 2023, therefore, public discussion on democracy and issues of human rights, along with public gatherings of more than five persons, were banned. Censorship was enforced by the National Council for Peace and Order. Many activists and dissenters were subjected to allegations of criminal activities, ranging from disruptions of public order to treason, cyber-crimes and for insulting the monarchy (*lèse-majesté*) thereby challenging their freedom of expression. More than 1200 people were arrested and charged with crimes, while thousands more interrogated and forced to cease voicing political opinions in opposition to the military government. Military officials imprisoned individuals for up to seven days without providing the opportunity for attorneys or protection towards maltreatment (Phasuk, 2018) with Prime Minister, Prayut Chan-o-cha stressing the need for a strong *lèse-majesté* law⁴ (found in article 112 of Thailand's criminal code) to safeguard the monarchy (BBC News, 2017).

In 2015, B-Floor's revival production of *Bang lamoet⁵ din-daen thi rao mai khoei pen chao-khong* [*County of Infringement: The land that has never belong to us*] at Thonglor Art Space, Bangkok criticised the lack of freedom of expression by the people in Thailand; the supposed 'land of the free'

⁴ Article 112 deals with Insulting or Defaming the Royal Family: 'Whoever defames, insults or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent, shall be punished with imprisonment of three to fifteen years' (Thai Law Library, 2024).

⁵ *Bang Lamoet* was first launched by B-Floor theatre in 2011 and then re-staged in 2015 after the latest coup.

was threatened by the state. It was the first time in almost 40 years that military authorities required a contemporary theatre troupe to request permission from the military government and to provide a script before launching this performance in public. During performances between January and February 2015, military officials were tasked with observing and recording videos of all performances (Chuechang, 2015). B-Floor's *Ni mai chai kan-mueang: Ceci n'est pas la politique* [*This is not politics: Ceci n'est pas la politique*] premiered in 2015 and was restaged in 2017. This interactive performance shows a criminal investigation, in which audiences could vote to remove characters in the play or return them to the stage (Limpiphat, 2018).

After the sorrowful passing, on 13th October 2016, of King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), his 70-year reign ended. Thai people were in mourning for a year and government and public agencies and private corporations refrained from organising joyful activities, events or entertainments, including theatre activities. The former king's son, Vajiralongkorn, ascended to the throne in May 2019. King Vajiralongkorn as Rama X became the tenth monarch of the Chakri Dynasty. When the COVID-19 pandemic led to lockdowns and social distancing from March 2020, many public activities, including performances, ended. But political protests, including acts of resistance against the military government, particularly by young people, continued with organised protests which often broke public gathering bans and challenged censorship of public expressions related to the monarchy. Some new theatre artists, like a member of Lanyim Karnlakorn (Lanyim theatre troupe) was threatened after a poem reading in Chiang Mai on 19th July 2020. Months later, he was summoned by Royal Thai Police and charged under article 112 for *lèse-majesté*. A veteran Thai northern contemporary dancer and choreographer Waewdao Sirisuk was also menaced by state authorities because of her performance of *fon thewa-nari* (dance of angel) before the Three Kings monument in Chiang Mai city on 30th April 2021 (Thai Theatre Foundation, 2023a).

Even after vaccinations made public events viable under the COVID-19 pandemic, persistent Thai political issues remained a crucial resource for performing artists to communicate their messages to Thai society. *A Thai Mirror* (2022), for instance, was a collaborative project between B-Floor Theatre Thailand and the French La Compagnie Franchement, and was based on true stories of Thai political refugees in France. B-Floor Theatre's *I say Mingalaba, you say Goodbye* (2023) revisited the relationship between Thailand and Myanmar in mainstream history, through perspectives of Thai and Myanmar artists. *Four Days in September (The Missing Comrade)* by For What Theatre depicted the rampant silent political violence in Thailand, exploring how, during the three decades after absolute monarchy ended in 1932, efforts at democracy unfolded amid cases of political abduction. The performance illustrated how the lives of regular Thais were obliged to remain blind and mute for a long time (Bangkok CityCity Gallery, 2022). This performance premiered outside Thailand in June 2021 at Vienna's Wiener Festwochen Festival, and then toured to Brussels' Kunstenfestivaldearts

(July 2021) and Festival d'Automne in Paris, France (October 2021). It first showed in Bangkok in 2022 with support from the private Bangkok CityCity Gallery. For What Theatre has also created many productions to give voice to political messages as performing artists to Thai society, such as *This Song Father Used to Sing* (Three Days in May), which was performed in 2013, 2015 and 2018, with European tours in 2019, 2022 and 2023. Another show, *Juggle and Hide* (2023), premiered at Kyoto Experiment in Kyoto, Japan, and *By the Book* (2023) a dance performance with constitution reading and *Just Away* (2023), involving a collaboration with Miss Theatre was launched at the Bangkok Theatre Festival 2023.

Performing artists continued to express themselves on political issues, many non-mainstream productions reflect current Thai social problems such as 'I don't care... *Mai wa yang rai*' [I don't care...no matter what], a collaborative production by B-Floor Theatre and Residentztheatre, Germany, based on a true story of Thai and German transgenders. *Maha samut sut khop fan [The ocean at the end of dream's horizon]* (2019) by Cherry Theatre and Pawaluk Suraswadi created from an applied theatre process with the Myanmar children (Suraswadi, 2020). This production echoes the problem about children rights recognition on the stateless youth and their migrant parents from Myanmar in Mahachai District, Samutsakorn Province, where large community of Myanmar migrant workers in fishery business is situated.

On the other hand, mainstream theatre productions still present conventional Thai ideologies in their works to the public and remain popular. *Hom Rong the Musical [The Overture the Musical]* was a commercial musical theatre work by Toh Gloam and Workpoint Entertainment staged at Kbank Siam-Pic-Ganesha Theatre and stressed the essence of Thainess in the story of a famous Thai traditional musician. The latter opened in April 2015 and ran for 27 performances and was re-staged twice in November 2015 and in August 2018. The other remarkable musical, *Si Phaen Din the Musical [Four Reigns the Musical]* by Scenario performed at Muang Thai Ratchadalai Theatre and was based on a classic novel of MR Kukrit Pramoj, *Si Phaen Din [The Four Reigns]*. This production ran for 100 performances between November 2011 and March 2012 and was restaged in 2014 for 50 performances (3 months after the latest coup) and in 2017 for 63 performances. The 2017 version was made more poignant due to the death of King Rama IX. With over 200 performances, this production gained over 500 million baht from ticket sales and more than 300,000 viewers, The Thai Senate praised the work as a performance to encourage Thai people to be loyal and to highlight the significance of the monarchy in Thai society (Matichon Weekly, 2017).

1.3.3 The current situation of performing arts policy and platforms in Thailand

Thailand's national policy between 2019-2022 follows the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) which aimed to develop Thailand 4.0, representing the fourth

industrial revolution aiming for sustainability by wider use of integrated digital systems (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020n). In 2017, the Strategic Transformation Office (STO) was established by the Order of the Head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Number 19/2018 (B.E. 2561) to drive national reforms by implementing the National Strategy and the Reconciliation Plans. The resulting 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037) has been called Thailand's first long-term comprehensive strategic plan for national development, seeking to build Thailand as 'a nation of stability, prosperity, and sustainability, ... a developed nation according to the economic philosophy' (Strategic Transformation Office, 2017). This long-term strategy set up by the military government also led to many criticisms. Some pointed to the short timeframe to move from planning to implementation, being announced in September 2017 and launched in October 2018, and many more criticised the lack of the plan's transparency and inclusivity (Laochokchaikul and Ratnatilaka Na Bhuket, 2024).

The Ministry of Culture also launched a new cultural policy with a long-term roadmap, first as a short-term vision in the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP, 2017-2021). Under the new 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037) that was launched during the 12th NESDP, all ministries had to adjust their policy and action plans to suit this new national long-term strategy. As part of the Ministry of Culture, the OCAC had developed Policies and Strategies to Foster Contemporary Arts and Culture for 2017-2021 (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2017a) that were published before the new long-term plan was announced. The OCAC had to rework their action plans to suit the new 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037), resulting in the OCAC's Action Plan to Foster Contemporary Arts and Culture, 2020-2022 (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2020) which was launched in 2020. Unfortunately, none of these plans addressed or included anything related to audience development.

When looking at the contemporary performing arts sector in 2020, despite experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand did not immediately announce a complete lock down. Consequently, 313 theatre productions were produced in Thailand in that year, albeit under many restrictions in theatre venues. Almost half were spoken drama at 42.1%, 22.85% were non-verbal performances (e.g., mime, dance and physical theatre) and musicals made up 10.3%, while others consisted of a variety of performances including performance art, play readings, immersive theatre, puppet theatre, opera, operetta, object theatre, cyber-performance, and filmed performance. The last quarter of the year was the most popular time for contemporary performing arts events, with the Bangkok Theatre Festival (BTF)⁶, staging 37 productions in various Bangkok venues in November 2020 (The

⁶ See more information on BTF in Appendix 3.

Showhopper⁷, 2020), and some international festivals were cancelled or transformed into an online platform instead, such as the Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting (BIPAM)⁸ and Bangkok International Children's Theatre Festival or BICT Fest⁹.

For over two decades, the BTF has been a collective event of fringe theatre groups from Thailand¹⁰ to promote and develop its contemporary performing arts. Most participating theatre companies and artists need to fund production costs themselves since the BTF receives only a small amount of ad hoc support from governmental authorities and corporate sponsors, which varies from year to year; grants are also used for the festival administration. While the BTF has been successful in terms of its long duration and for an annual focus for performing artists, finding regular audiences to fill the available seats for performances and ensuring that they return for more performances is an ongoing challenge for the festival administration team. Free events can often attract audiences more than ticketed performances, but some artist informants claimed that the festival timing might be a factor. Since many theatre companies' staffs need to prepare for their own production, no one preparing to perform is free to go to watch other performances at the same time. Also, informants suggested that although audiences might have limited budgets for ticket buying, they could not afford to pay for all the BTF shows. Finally, theatre companies and artists usually also end by saying 'We need to develop audiences!' but that they lack the knowledge on how to do it. It is difficult at this stage to say whether the artists quoted above are venturing truly held thoughts or are not merely repeating opinions. A survey by the Visiting Arts, UK, who published the 'Thailand Arts Directory' in 2002 as a part of the Visiting Arts South East Asia Regional Arts Profile Project, likewise points out a still relevant issue in Thai contemporary theatre: 'One of the biggest problems facing Thai theatre practitioners today is how to attract paying audiences to anything other than commercial theatre with star names' (Visiting Arts, 2002, p.18). Audience problems for contemporary theatre audiences have been noted since at least 2002, and it remains active more than two decades later. Non-mainstream theatre practitioners still complain about the lack of audiences. How can the Thai non-mainstream performing arts sector grow audiences for their performances? This audience issue is a major

⁷ This information aims to give a snapshot of the contemporary performing arts' situation in Thailand, due to the lack of official statistics on taking part in surveys from Thai government organisations. Showhopper is an active PR & online media consulting company whose performing arts' news platform on Facebook was launched in 2016. The company's work usually focuses on the contemporary performing arts sector in Thailand. It also has a research and consulting unit aiming to annually conduct a survey of Thai theatre.

⁸ See more information on BIPAM in Appendix 2.

⁹ See more information on BICT Fest in Appendix 2.

¹⁰ Fringe is a kind of arts festival featuring alternative or experimental performances without any specific criterion of selection. Any kind of works can be presented in this event, following rules of the festival.

challenge for this study, and this problem suggests some deeper issues in Thailand's arts and culture sector.

1.4 Research objectives and research questions

This study examines the barriers that have affected the development of Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing arts and audiences. Both are largely invisible to the government and systematically marginalised by policy makers. Although performances of this type regularly appear on Thai stages, these works and their creators lack official recognition, so that they are rarely included in official research and policy making. Moreover, because many small theatre groups mostly focus on their productions, they collect little data or even information about audiences. To understand the formation and function of the barriers affecting the development of Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing arts and its audiences, and to cast light on this arts sector and its audiences and make both more visible, this research examines some key processes that contributed to '*the invisibility of audiences in policy, research and practice in Thailand*' in this sector. In particular, it asks the following research questions (RQ) and research sub-questions (RSQ):

RQ 1: What are the key relationships between traditional and contemporary Thai performing arts and how have shifts in these relationships affected the place of contemporary performing arts and its audiences in Thailand?

RSQ 1.1 How have differences between old forms and new forms of performance been encountered or interacted with and how do these interactions affect audiences?

RQ 2: How does the notion of 'Thainess' or national identity challenge contemporary performing artists and affect audiences' decisions about attending this type of performance?

RSQ 2.1 How do contemporary performing artists and their audiences perceive the notion of Thainess, especially in relation to the contemporary performing arts?

RSQ 2.2 How do perceptions of Thainess in contemporary performing arts affect decision-making about attending contemporary or traditional performing arts events?

RSQ 2.3 To what extent do Thai audiences' perceptions of Thainess in contemporary performing arts differ from those of performing artists and the government?

RQ 3: What actually are the existing models of financial support for the arts in Thailand, and how do they affect performing artists and their audiences?

RSQ 3.1 To what extent does the government's view on Thainess affect its funding and support for contemporary performing arts?

RSQ 3.2 How does international funding play a role in developing audiences for the contemporary performing arts in Thailand?

1.5 Critical framework

The empirical study of the development of contemporary performing arts audiences cannot be divorced from an analysis of their socio-political contexts. Different theories will be utilised to investigate the constraints and barriers of contemporary performing arts audience development in the Thai arts and cultural system. International views of 'audience development' and audience studies will provide a starting point in this. A framework of interrelated concepts, including audience gaze, nationalism and their interaction with 'Thainess' and 'farang' (western, foreign), notions of ideology, hegemony and viewer's decoding position will be coordinated to investigate the above research questions.

1.6 Research methodology

The research methodology utilised in this thesis combines document analysis with qualitative methods of in-depth interviews with various stakeholders in Thailand's contemporary performing arts sector, including focus groups. Firstly, document research collected data from historical sources and policy documents like the National Economic and Social Development Plans.

Secondly, in-depth interviews were used to answer the research questions from the perspectives of different stakeholders in the contemporary performing arts. Fifteen in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 2022 and January 2023 with 15 representatives from different stakeholders in contemporary performing arts, including governmental organisations, non-mainstream private arts organisations, non-mainstream artists, funding agencies, PR agencies and critics.

Thirdly, focus group discussion helped to investigate audience perspectives and attitudes to contemporary and traditional performing arts. The groups included the selection of the general public of different ages in the greater Bangkok metropolitan area (including nearby cities) and other areas of Thailand. Focus group participants are divided into two categories: audiences and non-audiences,

namely those with and those without experience of watching contemporary performing arts. Data came from 12 focus groups – 60 participants in total, with approximately 5 participants in each group – which met between December 2022 and February 2023.

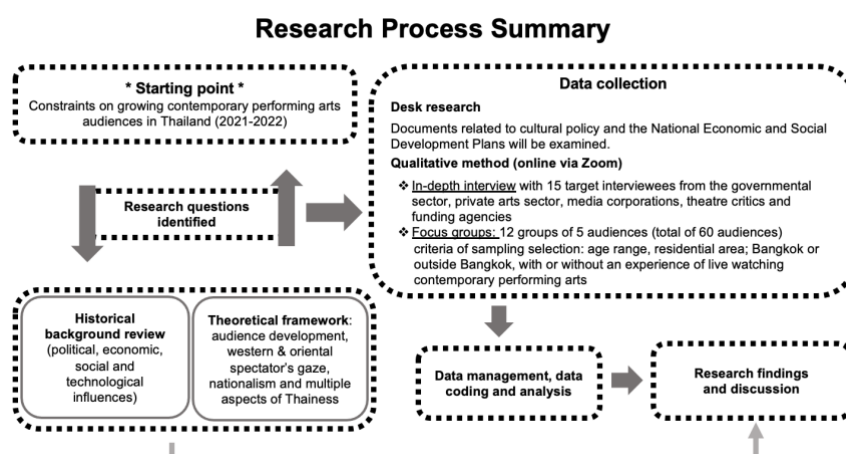
Due to the unstable situation of the COVID-19 outbreak and concern for social distancing of the Thai public from early 2020 to early 2023, all data collection (in-depth interviews and focus groups) was conducted online via Zoom meetings.

1.7 Research originality and contributions

The above empirical data aims to contribute to knowledge of Thai contemporary performing arts administration studies and performing arts audience studies at both a theoretical level and for policy advocacy. It is the first academic study of performing arts administration and contemporary performing arts audiences in Thailand. It is also the first research to connect the relations of Thainess to non-mainstream contemporary performing arts stakeholders, including its audiences.

Although the thesis focuses on contemporary uses of Thainess in cultural settings, this concept is connected to a deeper and more basic question, namely, how does ‘nationhood’ constrain the development of the contemporary arts, especially in other Southeast Asia countries. Finally, this academic research will lay the foundations for new studies and projects in Thai performing arts administration and audience development studies. The results of this research will therefore not only clarify the constraints and weaknesses at the micro-level of the Thai non-mainstream performing arts sector in Thai arts and culture, but also argue for the possibility of policy advocacy, including proposing new potential issues for future research in related fields (See more in Chapter 7, Section 7.2 for further discussion).

The diagram below presents the main flow of the research process used in this dissertation.



1.8 Thesis overview

The research project is outlined in chapter 1 by introducing the research rationale, defining keywords used in the study, and sketching the landscape of contemporary performing arts in Thailand from past to present. It also provides the research objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, methodology, research originality, and significant contributions. Chapter 2 provides a critical framework and reflections on Thainess, audience studies and audience development. Next, the notion of audience's gaze is discussed, from both the aspect of artistic appreciation and the recognition of national identity, namely 'Thainess' for Thai audiences. Later parts of chapter 2 analyse the relevant literature and theories and then address gaps and constraints of developing audiences in a Thai context before offering a realistic path toward the case study in Thailand.

Chapter 3 clarifies the research methodology, policy document research, and qualitative approaches of in-depth interviews and focus groups to address the research questions and to demonstrate all assumptions of the researcher. The details of the research data collection process, its practical constraints and research ethical issues appear in this chapter. The findings from document research appear in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 provides empirical findings from in-depth stakeholder interviews and focus groups. Chapter 6 follows by combining an analysis of findings in Chapters 4 and 5 before Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the thesis' research limitations, the main research contributions and possible areas for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and critical frameworks

This chapter examines the relationship between performance and audience reception, focusing on ancient Greek, Asian theatre and contemporary performance. Using the notion of 'the Gaze', it argues that the spectator's view of performances is key to understanding western artistic appreciation (Bourdieu, 1993). It contrasts this with the view of 'the Gaze' of Thai people in relation to 'Thainess'. The chapter links the concepts of nationalism and national identity to various dimensions of 'Thainess', and then relates them to concepts of ideology, hegemony and viewers' position for decoding. The chapter next will review two main types of literature on audience studies, namely, audience studies in theatre and performance studies and research on audience development from an arts industry or arts organisations' perspective, which typically views an 'audience' as customers. This will include examining the definitions and objectives of audience development, how to develop audiences, the synergy of education, artists and marketing and audience development models. Finally, the chapter will analyse the situation from international viewpoints on current arts audience research in Thailand, addressing gaps and constraints to provide this research with scope and direction.

2.1 Audience relationships to the theatre

Traditionally, audiences are vital to various live art forms since audiences need to be present at the right place and at the right time for any presentation. A painting can be published in a book collection and recorded music may be available wherever someone can engage a copy of it. For theatre and dance, however, if no audience comes to watch a performance in a venue, there is no reason to present live work. As Jerzy Grotowski, in his *Towards a Poor Theatre* argues: 'what takes place between spectator and actor...at least one spectator is needed to make it a performance' (2002, p.32). Although performing arts offer unique experiences to audiences as a group, each audience member simultaneously enjoys those experiences as an individual. Therefore, the process of receiving an artwork still occurs in each individual member of an audience, as playwright Paula Vogel argues: 'I write the script, the directors and actors and designers write the production, and the audience writes the play. If there are 200 audience members, there are 200 plays' (Bernstein, 2014, p. 24). The same play from the same company of creators can be widely interpreted and given new meanings through audiences who have different backgrounds and expectations.

From an artist's viewpoint, the audience is a vital part of the art production process, often as a final piece of a jigsaw puzzle needed to complete the creative process, which appears as an artwork publicly presented for the audience to enjoy. Yet the audience may also be a starting point for a production team to consider when creating an artwork. An artistic exchange occurs 'when the

audience member encounters the artistic work, and the artist encounters the audience. The reaction of each audience member is inherently unpredictable and idiosyncratic.' (Brown and Ratzkin, 2011, p. 18). Intrinsic value diverges 'from production to production and from patron to patron' (Bernstein, 2014, p. 2-3).

Currently, in 2024, things are in flux. Digital technologies and new devices have disrupted traditional modes of presenting the performing arts, making the notion of an audience and live performance more complex. While some audiences may watch a live performance on stage in the theatre, others may be able to enjoy the same performance screened in local cinemas near their homes via a live broadcast. This is seen in National Theatre Live in the UK (National Theatre, 2020a) or MET: Live in HD from New York (The Metropolitan Opera, 2022). Audiences have other options to appreciate live performances as digital record streams on demand via various websites or digital platforms, e.g., Marquee TV (2022), Broadway.com (2022), Digital Theatre.com (2021), National Theatre at Home (2020b), and Australian Theatre Live (2023). Nowadays, conventional modes of performing arts presentation, i.e., live on stage before audiences physically in the venue of the performance, may blur into performances shared by digital mediation. It is now possible to choose how to be an audience. Will one be an audience member by attending a theatre performance to view a live performance with an in-person and real time group or will one view a performance on electronic devices at home or anywhere in an isolated experience? This choice offers today's audiences more accessibility, so they can appreciate digitally mediated performing arts. The practice of being an audience member and being live in this digitally influenced time is thus more complicated than in the past.

Many earlier scripts and performances in western theatre also led to unpredictable or unclear reactions or responses by spectators, leading Sauter to argue that 'there was never any agreement about the outcome of theatrical event' (2022, p. 116). Historians such as Brockett see close ties between primitive ritual and the rise of western theatre, highlighting that 'this primitive ritual also contained the seeds of theatre, for music, dance, masks, and costumes were almost always used' (1969, p. 55). The worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, was introduced to the Greeks from Asia Minor in the thirteenth century BCE. It evolved from ecstatic hymns (dithyrambs) and choral dancers, which were performed in religious contexts. Early evidence of Greek drama was found in 534 BCE, occurring in the annual early spring City Dionysia festival (ibid.). During four days of the week-long celebration, up to seventeen theatrical plays were performed (Jackson, 1996). Three dramatic types of theatre, namely tragedy, comedy, and the satyr play, arose in ancient Greece, and became the basis of much of western theatre today (National Theatre, 2022). As Jackson notes, in democratic Athens, theatre was a forum for all citizens to join to explore political issues, so that 'for the duration of the festival, law courts would be closed, governmental and municipal business

suspended and people who lived in the neighbouring rural townships would leave their agricultural tasks and flock to the city. Athenian prisons would even release inmates for the duration of the festival so they could attend the processions, plays and sacrifices' (1996). This relationship between theatre and democracy was a striking characteristic of Greek theatre towards the end of the 6th century B.C.(Scott, 2018).

Theatre audience reception is tied to what Aristotle's *Poetics* calls 'catharsis' effects, namely the release or resolution which audiences should experience individually from watching a tragedy (Halliwell, 1987), but this catharsis is explained as a desired impact of spectators' feeling, which may not always be the audience's actual experience. 'Schiller claimed that the theatre was a moral institution. Jesuits as well as socialists considered theatre as a means for propagating ideas, whereas Roman and later emperors used theatre to keep the masses calm' (Sauter, 2002, p. 116). In the mid-nineteenth century, Richard Wagner formulated his concept of the 'Total Work of Art' (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) in his works *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (The Artwork of the Future; 1849), *Die Kunst und die Religion* (Art and Religion; 1849), and *Oper und Drama* (Opera and Drama; 1852) from 'the artworks of the 18th-century Enlightenment through classicism and romanticism' (Brown, 2016, p. 263) and many other scholars. He made the concept the central focus of how he composed his musical dramas and operas. He sought to use the Greek key idea seen in tragedies written after the fall of Athens that harmonise word, music and dance. 'For Wagner, one should aspire to create a perfect society in which the perfect harmony of the work of art could again exist... He approached Baudelaire's concept of "synaesthesia",...where all of the senses, acting in harmony, are awakened and lead to more profound appreciation and experience' (Wolfman, 2013). Later, in the early twentieth century, Bertolt Brecht, the German dramatist-director, theorised Epic theatre and developed 'alienation-effect', or 'A-effect' (*Verfremdungseffekt*) to oppose the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the idea of the fourth wall. The latter was presumed to separate performers from audiences in realistic theatre by including theatrical techniques that would cut emotional involvements of the audience in the performance and prompt audiences to be more aware of being part of a theatrical production. Audiences became 'a passive (suffering) part of total work of arts. Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against... Words, music and setting must become more independent of one another' (Willet, 1964, p. 38, also cited in Gordon, 2006, p. 228). Despite these developments concerning the effect of performance on audiences, the empirical examination of real audience perceptions of theatrical works is mostly a later development.

Early empirical research on theatre audiences includes studies of spectator reactions undertaken between in 1924-1925 by Vasily Fyodorov, the assistant director of Vsevolod Meyerhold in Moscow. Fyodorov designed probable reactions of spectators to plays and then recorded observed audience reactions during the performances of five productions. After publishing his findings in an arts journal,

a lively debate arose among scholars. Mikhail Zagorski argued against this behavioural investigation, critically noting that it is important to focus on: 'Who reacts when, how and upon what' (Kleberg, 1980, p.121 in Sauter, 2002). Such a question is still relevant to what theatre practitioners now do in their audience research (ibid.).

2.2 The gaze

2.2.1 Gaze as artistic appreciation: the practice of making meaning

Another key notion tied to audiences relates to viewers' attitudes to performances in Asia. Beryl de Zoete and Walter Spies (2002) use a western perspective in their book, *Dance & Drama in Bali*, first published in 1938, to situate Balinese audiences in Indonesia.

Watching dancing is not for the Balinese a matter of such concentrated attention as with us. It is almost a state of being, a feeling rather than an action. We gaze and gaze with an earnestness of purpose which fatigues us long before the dance is over. The Balinese, like other Orientals, enters into the atmosphere of the dance and remains there as in familiar landscape... The story, which so much interests us, does not trouble the Balinese in the least. He does not mind at what point it is taken up, nor at what point it is left. The success of a play never depends on the story... We listen for the story while looking at the action. The Balinese are absorbed in the rhythm, in a general not a particular action. And about the general action no one is in the doubt, for everyone on the Balinese stage has his traditional, generalized style of dress and movement (2002, p.16)

Here de Zoete and Spies contrast western modes and Asian modes of performance appreciation by audiences, stressing the intense solemn western gaze aiming to get into the story opposed to the non-western audiences' almost unconscious entry into a collective rhythmic atmosphere produced by the performers. Thai traditional audiences have similar attitudes to the Balinese, as Thai scholar Anuman Rajadhon (1990) discusses in 'Arts and Humanity' when he differentiates between appreciating Thai traditional performing arts and new western-influenced drama, arguing that 'Thai traditional Dance aims for presenting beauty in dancing and singing; thus, dancers need to be trained for long periods. The important point of watching traditional dance is the beauty of skilful dancing, the story is not main point' (ibid., p.48). This helps explain why Thai traditional dancers often perform the same story many times, e.g., Ramakien and Inao (ibid.). Japanese audiences of traditional Kabuki theatre also attend to performances in a casual and informal manner; as Earle Ernst (1956) notes 'the attention of the audience may be at the beginning of an act, the audience come gradually, though never quite to the same degree as the Western audience, to concentrate on the play' (p.91). Since Kabuki actors understand the chaotic nature in Kabuki theatre without seeing its behaviour as rude, 'The present behaviour of the audience is based firmly on historical precedent and that the

Kabuki has always been attended much more nearly in a spirit of picnicking than in one of solemn observance' (ibid., p. 91).

Japanese traditional popular theatre, Balinese dance and Thai traditional dance performances are appreciated by audiences who are drawn into the atmosphere and rhythm of performances. There is no black out and no fourth wall as in modern western theatre, where performers and audiences are separated by an invisible wall and audiences are expected to watch quietly and invisibly with full attention. Because Thai traditional dance normally performs well-known episodes from Thai legends and literature familiar to everyone, audiences, the skilful, beautiful, encompassing dance more than the story. When de Zoete and Spies reacted to Balinese dance, they explained it as different from the western 'gaze', but they still used the focused viewing to get at the different mode of appreciation seeing Balinese audiences as opposed to what western theatre audiences do. In other words, they try to intently observe Balinese dance using the western notion of gaze, rather than being involuntarily immersed in the atmosphere and rhythms of the performance like Balinese audiences.

De Zoete and Spies use the notion of 'gaze' without using the actual term to characterize the process of viewing by (western) spectators' eyes (Bourdieu, 1993). But more than an untrained and passive act of looking or seeing, 'gaze', as Decamps argues, is a learned behaviour. 'To see nature is a formula that the slightest examination reduces almost to the proportions of nonsense. If it is only a question of opening your eyes, anybody can do it. Dogs too can see. The eye is undoubtedly the still of which the brain is the receptacle, but one must know how to use it...One must learn how to see it' (Bourdieu, 1993, p.245). For this research this perspective means that theatre audiences need to learn how to watch performances. They acquire a practice with learned abilities to interpret and understand meanings embedded in each kind of performance. Audiences need to be trained to appreciate performances or what they see will be meaningless, and watching performances will not allow them to understand messages that artists create to show them something (Maitland, n.d.).

This perspective raises two key and interrelated questions in contemporary art criticism. First, how can the gaze become a means of communication? Second, how does the gaze actually convey assumptions and information of the spectator or spectated? 'Here a gaze can transcend the medium in which it is produced and contains social implications beyond its function within the work of art' (ibid.). In the performing arts, artists produce a performance for an audience to watch and it generates and signifies meaning from the view of the producer or performing artist to the audiences. While gazing on a performance, the audience processes what they are watching into some meaning via complicated negotiations, including their prior individual experience, social process and cultural conventions. Thus, meanings adjust and mobilise between the interrelation of artist as a producer and audience as a viewer during the process of making, interpreting, performing and watching a performance. This way of making meaning relates to concepts used in the visual arts and media

studies. Sturken and Cartwright (2009, p. 49) highlight three possible components associated with meaning making that may be relevant to Thailand, aside from the performance and its creator, which may be adjustable to the case of performing arts. They are:

- 1) the performance as an artwork depending on the conventions and codes that organise them. In other words, each form of performance has its own conventions and particular ways to encode meanings in it.
- 2) the audience and the way they interact with or interpret the performance.
- 3) the circumstances or contexts when the performance is shown and experienced. This may refer to the contemporary social setting --in regular theatre or the specific sites-- or occasions that the performance is launched, for instance, in a public demonstration, and the king's birthday celebration.

Though it might be argued that a work of the performing arts may have a dominant or an initial meaning, audiences may comprehend and apply meanings in various ways that do not necessarily comply with the meanings desired by producer (ibid.).

The study of the gaze typically stresses theories related to the media of painting and film, and these traditionally often lacked a two-way live interaction with human beings. But nowadays, new technologies like virtual Zoom conferences and Microsoft teams can mediate art and performance through electronic devices. These digital platforms help to virtualise the ability to see and communicate with other people via the gaze (ibid.).

This research will build on the concept of the gaze as a two-way interaction process of art appreciation since it provides a useful way of analysing theatre and dance audiences' appreciation. Using the gaze in this way also offers a new way of understanding how today's performing arts audiences engage performances with powerful electronic devices, fast streaming connections and multiple interests in performance cultures. They live in an age of digital disruption and have numerous options for live (in person) and virtual performances via digital platforms.

2.2.2 Gaze as the filtering eyes on Thainess

In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Jean Paul Sartre considers 'gaze' as a battleground for 'the self to define and redefine itself; we become aware of our self as subject only when confronted with the gaze of the other and become aware of our self as object' (cited in Reinhardt, 2022). Furthermore, 'the definition of gaze has evolved from just a "look" into an "intent" look (i.e., the intention behind the gaze becomes crucial for its definition) and gaze can be thought of as a dynamic medium bridging the gap between art form [link] and social theory' (Reinhardt, 2022). Unlike Sartre, Michel Foucault

argues for an interactive view between the spectator's gaze and the gaze offered through the work of art, i.e., painting. For him 'the painter's gaze, addressed to the void confronting him outside the picture, accepts as many models as there are spectators, in this precise but neutral place, the observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange' (Foucault, 2002, p. 5). He underscores that 'no gaze is stable, or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right through the canvas, subject and object, the spectator and the model, reverse their roles to infinity' (ibid., p. 5). This relational view blurs the presumed boundaries of a spectator's gaze and a painting's gaze, confusing 'who is exactly gazing at whom; the gaze becomes a mode of interaction between the spectator and the work of art' (Reinhardt, 2022).

In psychological terms, the notion of gaze 'signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze' (Schroeder, 1998, p. 208). Film and media studies also consider this power relations, such as in the notion of the 'male gaze' often dominant in film, which is often argued to be a medium that generates sexualised representations of women from a male viewpoint (Mulvey, 2009). Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) explains the notion of the gaze as a medium for expanding domination by portraying socio-political power relations and disciplinary mechanisms in society. The explorers' gaze, for example, is often a way to look on newly found territories as colonial treasures (Pratt, 2008). This gaze centred on the power of the viewer's eyes also appears in how some Siamese people turn their gaze on foreigners. Official Siamese records since the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767) often classify Chinese, *khaek* (Arabs and South Asians) or *farang* (westerners) as outsiders or 'others'. During the nineteenth century colonial era, Siamese kings turned a similar gaze on *farang* culture. This evolving gaze of Siamese on outsiders is related to an ongoing process of re-considering Siam's identity that is still important in constructing the gaze on Thainess today. To study the gaze on Thainess in this thesis requires connecting it to nationalism in order to see how the idea of Thainess has been constructed and used in Thai society.

2.2.2.1 Thainess and its relationship to nationalism on the formation of the gaze on Thainess

The origins of the idea of the nation state are widely debated, but the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which recognised the right of sovereign states to govern themselves, can be seen as a starting point (Tischer, 2021). Without going into the details, it may be argued that nation-states largely began to take shape in Europe near the end of the eighteenth century, tied to the emerging concepts of nation and nationalism. The political historian and Southeast Asian expert Benedict Anderson argues in his remarkable book *Imagined Communities* (1983, 2006) that nationalism is a historically-produced cultural artefact, just like nationality and nation-ness.¹¹ 'To understand them properly we need to

¹¹ This book by Benedict Anderson revolutionised the study of nationalism. Among his numerous other publications are a collection of articles on Southeast Asian nationalism such as 'an analysis of the influence of anarchist ideas on Filipino

consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy' (Anderson, 2006, p. 4). Nationalism or the passion that can elicit strong attachments to ideas tied to a state is not a natural manifestation of 'national consciousness' but a political claim that is justified and dependent on the concept of the nation. The idea of the nation is a legitimating political manifestation that gives nationalism its value and power. When Anderson proposes his famous 'definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign', he also highlights that 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (ibid., p.6). The people who form the nation have never met before but are united and identified with one another through their imagined style 'as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship' (ibid.). The group of people believe they know each other, share some boundaries in common, and are interconnected through horizontal interactions with other group members. This type of group also believes they have a right to collective self-determination.

The 'state', unlike the nation, is a governing body whose main function is to exert control for the sake of exerting control. The 'nation-state' combines the two ideas, often proven challenging to balance. Modern states typically seek to assert their legitimacy by associating themselves with the nations they seek to govern. Rather than seeking to provide welfare to the people, states often primarily seek the well-being of the state. Thus, nationalism plays a crucial role in the state's quest for legitimacy as well as the maintenance of its dominance and popular support. It is widely accepted that a country's cultural identity is represented within it, so it is necessary to protect 'national' culture to uphold the sovereignty of the nation or national identity. The distinguishing characteristic of this national imaginary points to the shared mindset of individuals who believe that the nation is 'a limited, exclusive community, that it is (or should be) sovereign, and that it is a community worthy of sacrifice, ultimately the sacrifice of one's life' (Breuilly, 1999, p. 159). Anderson also points out that 'it would make things easier if one treated [national identity] as if it belonged with kinship and religion, rather than with liberalism or fascism' (2006, p. 5).

Nationalism in Thailand is a comparatively recent development associated with the gradual formation of the modern nation-state since the reigns of King Mongkut (1804-1868) and King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). The notion of 'Thainess' today evolved with the establishment of the Siamese nation-state. A classic articulation of Thainess comes from Prince Damrong Rajanubhab¹² (1973) who

nationalism; several books on language, power, violence and belief in Indonesia; The spectre of comparisons, nationalism, Southeast Asia and the world; an essay on social forces behind a 1976 counterrevolution in Thailand' (Chan, 2015).

¹² He is a brother of King Chulalongkorn and was a chief architect of bureaucratic reforms and later became praised as the Father of Thai History.

interprets it based on characteristics of the ethnolinguistic Tai groups. As he noted, 'The Tai knew how to pick and choose. When they saw some good feature in the culture of other peoples, if it was not in conflict with their own interests, they did not hesitate to borrow it and adapt it to their own requirement' (ibid., p. 4, cited in Peleggi, 2002, p. 12 and Harrison, 2010a, p. 15). Prince Damrong's view of Thainess was constructed around 'the act of borrowing' (Harrison and Jackson, 2009, p.335) things from others and adapting them to suit Thai preferences and circumstances.

Jiraporn Witayasakpan highlights two major moments in the history of Thai nationalism: first, under Rama VI's vision (1910-1925) and second, under the first regime of Marshal Phibulsongkram (1938-1944) after the 1932 revolution ended absolute monarchy. In both periods, Thai leaders utilised the concept of the nation to advance their own political ambitions (1992). Rama VI attributed his country's identity with his royal dynasty, where he says the 'main consideration is those people are loyal subject of whom. If they are loyal to Siamese king, they are authentic Thai' (Asvabahu¹³, 1974, p. 15). This first moment of Thai nationalism was a reflection of the history, as Thongchai Winichakul argues. Siam was an imagined community not comprised of a people (as defined by politics, religion, language or ethnicity) or a 'race', but rather of a monarchy (Winichakul, 2008). Phibulsongkhram tied the Thai nation to the people rather than the monarchy, but both he and Rama VI considered culture as the proper medium for propagating nationalism. Both used mass media and the arts as tools to establish hegemonic leadership.

In terms of their goals, target audiences, and degree of cultural manipulation, Rama VI's and Phibulsongkram's versions of nationalism differed. To defend his dynastic rule, Rama VI emphasised a royalist national ideology, primarily against challenges posed by a new and expanding bureaucracy. Hence, his goal was to spread nationalist thought throughout the bureaucracy (Witayasakpan, 1992). Phibulsongkhram, meanwhile, sought to increase his political influence in response to challenges from two distinct rival fractions, one the People's Party the Coup Group which overthrew the Chakri absolutist dynasty, and the old conservative aristocracy. Since the People's Party factions included both conservative military leaders and progressive civilian bureaucrats, Phibulsongkhram focused on winning approval of people both inside and outside the bureaucratic system. Therefore, Phibulsongkhram's nationalism required a new national cultural policy, shaped by contemporary internal and external socio-political circumstances, such as the large number of Chinese in Thailand, the impending war with imperial Japan, and the alliance with 'modern' Japan, leading to the arrival of many Japanese troops in Thailand from 1939. These circumstances promoted a new culture for Thailand that was anti-Chinese, anti-monarchical, and

¹³ Asvabahu is a pseudonym of king Rama VI, used in expressing his political ideologies to the public.

pro-modern. As a French-graduate, Phibulsongkhram saw that modern western culture –and modern Japanese culture– could offer the best role models for modernising Thailand (ibid.).

Field Marshal Phibulsongkhram officially defined 'Thai culture' (*wattanatham*) as possessing characteristics suggesting and fostering social wealth, order, national unity and progress, and people's morals. In addition, the leader provided a strong, centralised conception of state culture that guided national culture from the top down. For Phibulsongkhram, '*khwa pen thai* –Thainess– is thus an ideology, not a *description* but a *prescription*, a set of instructions of how to be a well-behaved citizen' (Cornwel-Smith and Goss, 2015, p. 10). The government laws, decrees and guidelines were part of a national cultural strategy whose policies were enforced on the Thai populace as a key component of nation-building. Different aspects of western culture were adopted to create a new culture and present Thailand as a modernised nation. Phibulsongkhram identified, elaborated and refined native elements to create a national standard that would preserve the quality of Thainess (Witayasakpan, 1992).

To incorporate the country's diverse ethnic groups into a single Thai culture, Phibulsongkhram adopted a cultural strategy and cultural identity that were dominated by the capital Bangkok, in the central Thai region. Serious issues were caused by this nationalistic cultural policy. As this strategy to centralise Thainess marginalised other ethnic minorities such as the Chinese, Muslims, and Laotians, seeing the dismissal and violation of their dignity and rights, they resisted but could not directly oppose it as they lacked political power. The state utilised its resources and authority, including the radio, public officials, education and legislation, to manage these disputes, but they sometimes removed people regarded as marginal or too disruptive (Reynolds; Sivaraksa; Samudavanija; and Terwiel, 2002 cited in Eamsa-Ard, 2006). Chinese culture was disavowed since it was considered neither Thai nor modern. Court ornaments and rituals were disregarded because they were felt to endanger the newly constituted government, which claimed to speak for the common people, and to reflect the previous era of absolute monarchy (Witayasakpan, 1992).

Nonetheless, Winichakul argues that since 'Thainess is never clearly defined, it is supposed that every Thai knows it is there' (1994, p. 5). He refers to a speech of the Thai scholar Kukrit Pramoj, who states that one is born with the collective identity of people in a nation. Although Pramoj 'confessed that he was not quite sure what identity means' (ibid., p. 5), he ascribes Thainess as a common attribute of the Thai people. Being Thai implies having particular sentiments and possessing unique personality traits. The Commission for National Identity even claims that it is an unalterable fact (Winichakul, 1994).

Although it is a challenge to clearly identify the features of Thainess, Winichakul notes that defining un-Thai is something that evolves over time. It is a matter of identifying Thainess from an outside

perspective, namely as a kind of otherness, called a process of 'negative identification'. Once it is clearer what is *not* Thai, it becomes easier to notice Thainess (1994). Normally, it is a matter of defining other nations or ethnic groups, 'but the referent nation or ethnicity is usually ill defined... A reference is sometimes made regardless of whether or not a certain characteristic really belongs to any particular nation or ethnic groups, but the aim of the discourse is to identify the un-Thainess rather than to define the characteristic of any particular people' (ibid., p. 5).

The scholar Sulak Sivaraksa argues that 'The Siamese must have realized their own identity even before intercourse with the west. They compared themselves especially with their neighbours –the Mons, the Khmers, the Burmans and the Laotians– despite the fact that all these peoples belonged to the same Theravada school of Buddhism' (2002, p. 33). Thais also observe cultural, political, and religious distinctions between themselves and Malays, Vietnamese and Chinese. Sivaraksa also points out that 'Although they acquired much of their spiritual tradition and advanced technology from India and Ceylon, they lumped these people together as *khaek* (visitors or foreigners). They did not want to share much of their identity with the *khaek* who later came to be regarded as those with Hindu or Islamic background. Hence Malays and the Javanese were also *khaek*, as were the Persians from the Middle East' (ibid.). As the Siamese learned about the west via Persians and Indians, they still refer to westerners generally as *farang*.

Leaders in both periods discussed above shared a similar admiration for the westerners (*farang*¹⁴). Pattana Kitiarsa notes that 'the *farang* served as an index to civilization in Vajiravudh's nationalist aspirations... He felt that through his nationalist programme and Buddhist morality, Siam must be uplifted in order to become on par with the Europeans and Americans' (2010, p.67). Peter A. Jackson's article '*The Ambiguities of Semicolonial Power in Thailand*' (2010) relates the concepts of 'duality', 'ambiguity' and 'semicoloniality' to Siam/Thailand, identifying it as a society characterised by having been semicolonised and subjected to foreign powers. These powers reflect local elite autonomy in the context of their general subordination to western authority and is described as tied to a duality that was ambiguous. He elaborates:

It was the double gaze of the nineteenth century absolute monarchy, simultaneously looking outwards towards the West and inwards towards the local population, that provided the historical foundation of the dialectical patterns of Siamese/Thai semicolonialism and the ambiguous cultural and other response that have emerged in its wake. In the outward gaze the Siamese monarchy occupied a subordinate position relative to the West, while in the inward gaze the monarchy was the dominant power over the local, subordinated population. While it is crucial to note the interrelationship of these outward and inward gazes, for analytical purposes it is equally important to

¹⁴ After centuries of interaction with the West and Westerners, a contemporary Thai understanding of the term '*farang*' has developed. Due to changes in the nature of Western participation in Asia, this term's implications have evolved over time. Because of the historical superimposition of divergent sentiments in various eras, present meanings are complex and ambiguous (Kitiarsa, 2010).

differentiate them as distinct dimensions of semicolonial power, for this difference is obscured in conservative discourses. Thai nationalist discourses derive their hegemonic power by obscuring the internal tyranny that the absolute monarchy and its successors exercised over the local population in order to secure their own political autonomy in the international arena... For the Siamese monarchy to remain 'free' from Westerner domination the Siamese populace was 'enslaved' to that monarchy in new ways (2010, p. 53).

Historian Craig Reynolds argues that foreign historians often view this admiration of westerners by Thai elites as a variant of colonisation, as 'the elite, whether royalist before 1932 or commoner after 1932, was colonised in consciousness' (1999, p. 263). These arguments challenge common claims that Siam/Thailand was never colonised during the period of western imperialism and point out that Siamese cultural awareness was colonised. The concept of the colonisation of Siam's cultural consciousness helps to understand the role of western ideas in creating contemporary aspects of Thainess (Kitiarsa, 2010).

Thongchai Winichakul goes on to pinpoint that the early emergence of Thai nationalism is a reflection of its history. Siam was an imagined community that was not comprised of a people (as defined by politics or ethnicity) or even a 'race', but rather as a monarchy. Despite never having been officially colonised, Siam was a 'semi-colonial' state due to the unavoidable collaboration with Siam's ruling class. Unlike other colonies where the rise of nationalism and an anti-colonial movement reduced the influence of such elites, Siam saw an unparalleled increase in the power of the ruling class. Siam flourished and became more centralised than ever with a semi-colonial absolute monarchy. The first nationalism in early 20th-century Siam constituted what Winichakul calls 'royal nationalism', characterised by adhering to the mainstream nationalist narrative. It still has significant power today and serves as the cornerstone of a nationalist discourse of dominance. Since being Thai is synonymous with being a royalist, if someone shows any disapproval or criticism of the royal institution, they will be suspected for not being Thai and be asked 'Are you Thai?' (Winichakul, 2008). 'The core values of Thainess are paternalistic, partly as a result of the idea that the King is the "father" of the nation' (Farrelly, 2016, p. 334).

This definition of un-Thainess, or negative identification, can also be found beyond nationality or ethnicity. The Thai state has labelled communism as the opposite of being Thai, so being a communist is Un-Thai. This was central to Thailand in the early Cold War period, apparent in 'the rationality of the anticommunist act (1952), whose model was the un-American activities legislation, was that communism is un-Thai in its ideas and as a way of life' (Jumbala, 1987 cited in Winichakul, 1994, p. 5).

Alongside the propagation of nationalism by Siamese leaders who attempted to form a collective perception of nationhood and unity among people in the country, Charnvit Kasetsiri (2016), a

renowned Thai historian, argues that the Thai state has published its official version of Thai history to instill state ideologies into people's minds. He defines this official Thai history as 'mainstream Thai history ประวัติศาสตร์กระแสหลัก' which is publicly distributed and used as standard school textbooks. For some nuance, he stresses that Thailand has three main approaches to national history. Firstly, there is *Royal nationalistic history* which emerged near the end of king Rama V's reign (early 20th century) and carried on until the beginning of king Rama VI's reign (ending circa 1925). Its narrative emboldened the monarchy and glorified three capital cities in three earlier periods (Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin) as the main focal points and storylines. These narratives and ideas were formed by king Rama VI and Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. Secondly, the *Military-bureaucratic national history* refers to events after the 1932 revolution ending absolute monarchy. It was mainly formulated by Luang Wichitwathakan, Khun Wichitmatra and Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, who launched 12 Cultural Mandates, which included the change of the country's name from Siam to Thailand. This version of Thai history traces Thai origins back 5,000 years. While retaining the narrative of three superior capital cities, it added Thonburi and built a King Taksin monument in Thonburi to mark this. This approach to Thai history focused on the leadership and the significance of the military as the protector of the country from foreign invasion. Thirdly, a *hybrid nationalistic history* emerged in 1957 at the end of a moment of military power. It mixes the first and second historical approaches and underscores major civil society-led political upheavals in following decades, such as the popular uprisings on 14th October 1973 and on Black May in 1992. Although the King was not part of an absolute monarchy system, there was a neo-monarchy which became a balancing force for the state. This third version of Thai history emphasises the crucial role of military leaders who usually defer to the king and attempt to create a political system whereby the King and monarchy are used to explain state legitimacy or legitimation. He also highlights that 'this is because, although military leaders have power, they lack *barami* or charismatic power' (Kasetsiri, 2016). This version created new terms like 'Thai-style democracy' 'ประชาธิปไตยแบบไทย' and 'democratic regime of governance with the King as Head of State การปกครองในระบอบประชาธิปไตยอันมีพระมหากษัตริย์ทรงเป็นประมุข' (ibid., p. 3).

Nonetheless, as different political groups fought for control of state apparatuses –which serve as both a means of governance and a means of defining the Thai nation– and rose to power, 'Thainess' transformed, helping to give 'Thainess' a dynamic and multifaceted character (Dejthevaporn, 2012).

Since the 1980s, the vision of Thainess has shifted from stressing political to economic functions, especially on powers of consumption. From the early 1990s, businesspeople, government officials and many intellectual advisors to businesses and government agencies have linked Thainess to globalisation as part of the new story of modernity. Globalisation can be seen in the expansion of foreign businesses into less developed parts of the region. Thai public discourse adopted Japanese

business strategist Kenichi Ohmae's phrase 'borderless world' to navigate globalisation. With the Thai economy being the fastest growing in the world between 1982 and 1994, Craig Reynolds argues for a new narrative of Thainess called 'Siamization of capitalism' (2002, p. 309). Even Buddhism, one of three main pillars of Thai identity, had to adjust to global capitalist prosperity in the boom years. Devotees turned to elaborate rituals that aimed to bring material wealth and happiness, which one observer called the 'prosperity religions' (ibid.). These movements involve a mysteriously named Theravada Buddhist monks (Magic Monks or *Phra Saksit*), who are both alive and deceased and said to have superhuman abilities. The Chinese bodhisattva of compassion, Guan Yin, became a popular deity among Sino-Thais who often prayed for material benefits. King Chulalongkorn's equestrian monument also became popular as an object of veneration. For this Siamisation of Capitalism, globalisation came to be seen as something happening from the inside rather than something forced from the outside and was able to cushion the negative repercussions of rapid economic expansion (Jackson, 1999). In parallel, during the boom era, the production, marketing and consumption of Thainess became one aspect of Thai identity in the chaotic 1990s. In this time, Thainess became a brand name in a marketplace of culture as opposed to something that the state prescribed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Thainess was no longer something to be preserved to maintain national security, but something to be (re)produced, marketed and consumed to help economic growth and national development (Reynolds, 2002).

To build on this, the article 'Consuming Thainess' by Kasian Tejapira contends that the impact of globalisation altered aspects of Thainess by expanding it to the international market and using consumption to turn Thai consumers into people with 'double identities' (2015, p. 132). Despite consuming global products, Thai people preferred to keep connected to some ways of being Thai. In this dual-faced condition, they do not want to feel guilty of consuming things that do not represent Thainess. Therefore, while they increased the exchange value of foreign brand names, they also sought to find ways to recover from feeling that they may not be Thai, integrating foreign brands into a sense of Thainess in their products. Tejapira argues that 'one can consume commodities of whether places of origin regardless of one's own identity with no nationalist angst, guilt or remorse' (Tejapira, 2001, p. 153). He goes on to argue that

Consumption also signals the liberation of national identity as signifier from the specific national or ethnic commodity-referents. Thus, Thainess becomes unanchored, uprooted and free from the regime of reference to commodities signifying national or ethnic Thai identity. Thainess is now able, as it were, to roam freely around the commodified globe to coexist and copulate with...any other un-Thai commodities (ibid., pp. 153).

Here, the meaning of Thainess has been transformed by an individual interpretation that can be adapted to other un-Thai cultures or commodities, which Tejapira defines as 'the psychological sublimation of un-Thainess, in which un-Thai urges are expressed under more socially acceptable

Thai signs' (ibid., pp. 161-162). Thai consumers can consume a sense of Thainess in global brands without feeling guilty about not purchasing or appreciating non-Thai items (ibid.). This sublimation of un-Thainess resonates with how Thai people adjust Thainess so that it can coexist with their un-Thai behaviours in an age of globalisation.

Yet Tejapira also uses the chemical term 'sublimation' to explain how cultural practices sublimate meanings, so that there is a change that occurs during sublimation, shifting from solid Thainess 'into air, spirited into the psyche, in order to purge it of those elements that are not conducive to un-Thai globalisation. The last step in the sublimation of Thainess is to resolidify it as a sign' (Tejapira, 2001, p. 162). This phenomenon can be conceptualised as the subjectification, spiritualisation and interiorisation of Thainess that shows interactions 'between the official ethno-ideology of Thainess and the popular desire to be Thai unleashed by the state. The result of this interplay is the negotiation, fragmentation and vaporisation of Thainess as an object of desire' (ibid., p. 165).

In 1980, the government realised the importance of identifying national identity, and established the Commission for National Identity under the Prime Minister's Office to promote Thai identities. This development reflects a persistent political ideology of nationhood, which encourages the formation of a central government effort to identify and define Thainess, even though Thailand is ethnically complex and consists of diverse indigenous populations in Isan (the north-east), various hill tribes in the north and Muslims in the south. Nowadays, in parallel with the globalising condition of Thainess from a cultural economic or consumption perspective, there was still a need to identify and promote other aspects of Thai society that highlight Thainess. Laungaramsri points out that although the Thai nation is 'often characterised as unique in its ethnic and cultural homogeneity' (2003, p.157), Thainess is defined as a 'collective identity' formed by shared similarities in language (Thai), religion (Buddhism) and monarchy. She also states that 'to be Thai is to be loyal to three principles or pillars: *chat* or nation (speaking Thai as a manifestation of memberships in the Thai nation), *satsana* or religion (being Thai as being Buddhist), and *phra mahakrasat* or the King (devotion to the monarchy)' (ibid., p. 157).

Thailand's military government that came to power in 2014 and ruled until 2023 saw 'itself as the guardian of Thainess, [which is to say] the guardian of the nation, the king, and the people' (Peel, 2015 cited in Farrelly, 2016). This military government's ideology played a crucial role in driving public sentiment and national pride and stresses the importance of admiring Thai beauty standards in national arts and culture. The respected Thai historian and scholar Saichol Sattayanurak critically analyses the public consensus on the Thainess of Thai people prevalent in society and suggests that Thainess appears to be the foundation of national art and culture and generates admiration for Thai beauty, leading to the nation's pride and patriotism. She points out that

Thai identity and Thai nationalism are two sides of the same coin. The perception of elements of 'Thainess' reinforces and makes the 'Thai nation' real and sensible in the Thai people's imagination. The meaning of Thainess is the root of **national art and culture**, which gave 'the land in the Shape of a Golden Axe', where the Thai people live, not only monarchs and Buddhism but also valuable Thai arts and culture. That arouses in the Thai people a love of and pride in the Thai nation and induces them to cherish the land of the Thais by placing great importance on territorial integrity.

Furthermore, many dimensions of Thainess, such as loyalty to the king, a belief in Buddhism, use of the Thai language, and admiration of Thai beauty or arts, also 'adorn the temperament' of Thai people to have the 'Thai mind', allowing them to accept a hierarchical social structure and centralised political structure to be correct and meritorious by the way of thinking that 'Thainess makes Thailand good'. This way of Thinking compels Thais to think that they should maintain spiritual Thainess (by accepting only material development and technology from the west), which would make 'Thailand good' forever (Sattayanurak, 2020, p.241).

This argument illustrates the collective sense on Thainess held by the Thai general public and the interplay of Thainess and nationalism uses this to shape the worldviews of Thai people, particularly in perception of Thainess in the arts. Besides, 'Thainess' has become dynamic and complex, with multiple characteristics such as Royalism, Thai-Buddhism culture and Thai style consumerism. In articles like '*Multiple Character of "Thainess": Struggle and Share of Defining Space*', Anuthee Dejthevaporn argues that these definitions have been merged under the umbrella term 'extraordinary state', where they occasionally coexist and occasionally contradict one another. As a result, the notion of 'Thainess' remains open and evolving (2012).

2.3 The concept of ideology, hegemony and decoding position of viewers

The previous section argued that the notion of the Gaze referred to distinct but interrelated processes of art appreciation and filtering eyes towards Thainess. To understand both functions of the gaze of Thainess formed in the framework of social forces and ideology, it is useful to relate them to theories of ideology, hegemony and decoding the positions of viewers.

2.3.1 The notion of ideology and hegemony

Ideologies are the belief system embedded in all cultures. Images, media, artworks, or performances are crucial media which convey and express ideologies. Media studies scholars use practices of looking to define ideology as 'the broad but indispensable, shared set of values and beliefs through which individuals live out their complex relations to arrange of social structures... Our ideologies are diverse and ubiquitous; they inform our everyday lives in often subtle and barely noticeable forms' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001, p. 21). They also argue that 'practices of looking are intimately tied to ideology. The image culture in which we live is an arena of diverse and often conflicting ideologies'

(ibid.). The influence of messages encoded in images, television shows or films help to enforce some constructed ideologies like nationalism, conventional notions of good and bad, romantic love, and stereotypes of heterosexual relationships to viewers. In modern times, ideologies are presented as if they are natural or given, rather than part of a belief system that was created to present a certain view of the world. This makes ideologies close to 'myth[s], connotations that appear to be natural' (ibid., p. 22).

One way of looking at ideology is through the prism of Karl Marx's theories. Marxism investigates the function of economics in the context of history and how capitalism operates through the lens of social class relations. Based on Marx's ideas, the owners of the means of production have power to control the thoughts and beliefs produced and shared through media platforms. In other words, media content is produced and distributed by the class of those who can control, dominate and own them (ibid.). Marx views ideologies as forms of *false consciousness* dominating the awareness of oppressed groups and classes while simultaneously justifying and sustaining their mistreatment (Encyclopaedia of Marxism, 2018). Many scholars criticise this idea as excessively totalising and centred on a hierarchical conception of ideology.

As a critic of Marx, Louise Althusser, a French Marxist theorist in the 1960s, challenges the common view of ideology which has influenced progressive perspective in media studies. He views ideology as not just showing the world's condition, whether right or wrong but rather as 'the system of the idea and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group' (Althusser, 1971, p. 158). He goes on to famously argue that 'ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (ibid., p. 162). Ideology is, for him, a significant representational tool through which people perceive and construct a sense of reality. Althusser uses some concepts from psychoanalysis to argue that ideology is a collection of beliefs and thoughts produced by the unconscious mind with regards to other factors involving the economics and institutions. He likens our relation to ideology to our response to 'being called' or interpellated by ideologies and that by doing so we become 'subjects' of the ideologies and gain an identity within the ideological system. He defines '*interpellation*' as the process whereby people are called into subject positions provided by the ideologies by language, media and expressive forms. Sturken and Cartwright remind us that for Althusser 'we are always already subjects – spoken by the ideological discourses, into which we are born and are asked to find our place. In this light, images interpellate or hail us as viewers, and in so doing designate the kind of viewer they intend us to be' (2001, p. 52).

Although Althusser's ideas on ideology have been very influential, they may be questioned. If individuals are continually marked as subjects and interpellated into who they are by ideology, there seems to be no chance for societal change. Our always already constitution as subjects by ideologies limits us from any sense of agency or power to change our life. A further challenge to

ideology relates to the need to engage with multiple ideologies. If there were a single mass ideology, it is hard to understand how individuals in financially and socially deprived circumstances could truly oppose a dominating ideology (ibid.). To help envision forms of resistance to ideology, Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony rather than the notion of domination.

Gramsci's idea of hegemony is useful to understand how the Thainess ideology is transmitted. His theory is mainly derived from Marxist scholars, i.e., Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Georg Lukács (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). He constructed a political approach that extends earlier theories. His analysis of many Marxist scholars' fundamental claim –that the enslavement by the ruling class in capitalism will end up resulting in political, economic and social revolution – is shown to not always be true. Instead, he argues that working-class people might choose to align themselves with those in the ruling class, and in doing so refuse to engage in any revolution. To explain this, Gramsci develops the notion of hegemony which is 'the spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group' (ibid., p. 12). This spontaneous consent of the public happens when hegemony is exercised by the ruling class. This exercise is 'characterised by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspaper and associations – which, therefore, in certain situations, are artificially multiplied' (ibid., p. 80). In other words, power operates in the workings of hegemony not from control of one group over another but through a process of negotiation amongst all classes, in the economic, social, political and ideological spheres where they all reside and work to challenge one another. Hegemony is thus produced through a power struggle that occurs at all social strata of a culture or society about the meanings, legislation and other characteristics of that society. A key part of hegemony emerges through relationships that work through culture, precisely since many people's everyday social reality could oppose them, developing their own counter-hegemonic power, as political groups or subversive cultural components, to form and challenge the current status quo about how things are and how and why they could be different. Seeing 'negotiation' (and struggle) as integral to the notion of hegemony enables us to recognise how individuals and groups can challenge the current situation and influencing social change in ways which may not benefit those who control the market (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001).

2.3.2 Communication theory's concept of encoding and decoding

Visual art and media studies argue that when a painting, film or TV programme is made and shown, it delivers producers' dominant meanings which they want and expect spectators to receive as the producers intended. In general, the processes of production and reception *encode* specific meanings

in objects or images by producers, as much as when objects are arranged and presented in selected spaces or circumstances. After spectators engage those objects or images, they *decode* the meaning embodied in them (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). Applying this *encoding-decoding* model to the performing arts views the playwright, director and/or performing artist as encoding some message or meaning into the performance via their production tools. When audiences watch the performance, they then *decode* the meaning in accordance with the audience watching, their cultural background and experiences and their own collection of cultural concepts.

Stuart Hall's famous article 'Encoding, Decoding' argues that the process of symbolic interchange or 'message form, is a determinate moment; though, at another level, it comprises the surface movement of the communications system only and requires, at another stage, to be integrated into the social relations of the communication process as a whole, of which it forms only a part' (1999, p. 509). Thus, he adds, 'production constructs the message' (ibid.). Hall offers a way for a viewer to take a position on deciphering the narrative constructed by television programme. He identifies three basic types of position: 1) dominant-hegemonic position; 2) negotiated position and 3) oppositional position (1999, pp. 515-516).

For the first position, the spectator who receives suggested meaning and then decrypts those messages refers to the code that has been encoded. Hall argues that this 'viewer is operating inside the dominant code' (1999, p. 515). He defines this type as 'dominant-hegemonic position', this type of viewer is compatible with the hegemonic view and understand the dominant message unquestionably. Sturken and Cartwright also indicate that this type of people 'decode images in a relatively passive manner' (2001, p.57).

In the second 'negotiated position', the viewer can negotiate an interpretation that differs from the production and its dominating messages. This type of negotiation can refer to the process of meaning bargaining which happens around the context, production, and viewer. By negotiating during interpretation, viewers usually contend with dominating meanings embedded in the production or image. Sturken and Cartwright point out that 'the term "negotiation" allows us to see how cultural interpretation a struggle which allows consumers to be active meaning-makers and not merely passive recipients in the process of decoding images' (2001, p. 57). In this way, spectators actively confront hegemonic views, enabling them to personally and culturally modify meanings and sometimes overturn the interpretation preferred by producers or larger social powers (ibid.).

In the third 'oppositional position', a spectator 'understand[s] both the literal and the connotative inflection given by a discourse but [decodes] the message in a globally contrary way' (Hall, 1999, p. 517). This type of viewer might totally disagree or discard those ideological agenda conveyed by image or production (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001).

The above three positions of viewers, interpretations or decoding process of any production or image generally occurs through the dynamic of binary exchanges involving conscious and unconscious acts. This procedure brings all knowledge, remembrance, cultural reference, productions or images themselves and embedded dominating connotation to interact with each other. 'Interpretation is thus a mental process of acceptance and rejection of the meanings and association that adhere to a given image through the force of dominant ideologies' (ibid., p. 57). This concept is useful to the discussion of Thai audiences and their perceptions of Thainess.

2.4 Audience research in theatre and performance studies

In the field of theatre and performance studies, research on theatre reception, such as Herbert Blau's (1990) *The Audience* and Susan Bennett's (1997) *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* focus on audiences to suggest a framework for analysing theatre reception. Rachel Fensham's (2009) *To Watch Theatre: Essays on Genre and Corporeality* and Jill Dolan's (2012) *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* deepen their works, showing how theatre reception works in specific performances. Recently, participatory performance has been widely discussed in theatre and performance, with Jacques Rancière's (2021) *The Emancipated Spectator* receiving much attention. He discusses theatre in relation to scholarly and curatorial interest in the enigmatic, hazardous and most crucial participant, namely, the audience which has largely remained silent, motionless and unexplored. Artists want to eventually meet their audiences, to hear what they say, converse with them and even to persuade them to participate in the performance (Burzyńska, 2016).

Several works have discussed theatre and performance in relation to performances and spectators who may be involved in the creative performance process as co-creators or as agents who socially and politically interact with other audience members or performers. These include Shannon Jackson's *Social Works: Performing Arts, Supporting Publics* (2011), Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), Scott Magelssen's *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* (2014), Gareth White's *Audience Participation: Aesthetics of the Invitation* (2013), Jan Sowa's 'It's Political Economy, Stupid! Towards Progressive Modes of Participation' (2016), Dominique Nduhura's 'To Participate or Not to Participate: A Closer Look into Forum Theatre and Freedom of Expression in Africa' (2016), Antoine Pickels's 'Let Me Participate and I'll Tell You Who I Am' (2016) and Anna R. Burzyńska's *Joined Forces: Audience Participation in Theatre* (ed., 2016). These and other works address present interesting debates on the level of audience involvement in performances. Ginters (2010) discusses Reason's (2010) and Bicknell's (2010) papers. Reason argues about the experience of being an audience in his paper 'Asking the Audience: Audience Research and The Experience of Theatre', noting that the experience of doing, such as dancing, playing in a music band, differs from the experience of viewing them.

‘Spectatorship...is a form of active perception, where we are often (but not always) aware of ourselves looking’ (2010, p. 20). While Bicknell’s paper (2010) uses a case study from a cross-country mountain bike event in Australia as a performance study of sport, arguing that ‘Like many accounts of theatre, much writing on sports performance –both theoretical and in sports media– favours the performance that is watched or executed over the experience of viewing, and the relationship between the performer and the spectator in the co-creation of the event’ (2010, p. 81). Ginters argues that Bicknell’s research also highlights a gap that challenges Reason’s hypotheses: ‘What if the spectator of the bike race is also an experienced, competitive cyclist herself? [Bicknell] finds that this certainty inflects her ‘audiences’ experience in profound and specifically performative ways’ (Ginters, 2010). This is an interesting study on sports spectators that uses the performance theory to explain the phenomenon of audience perception in live sport events.

In considering previous theatre audience studies, Freshwater notes that ‘It is certainly true that early work in cultural studies often characterised the mass audience as vulnerable, passive, and malleable, taking a pessimistic view of popular entertainment’ (2009, p. 28). Bennett, too, indicates in her *Theatre Audiences* book that

Television, above all, lacks the sense of public event that attaches to both theatre and cinema. It denies the audience the sense of contact with the performers that is integral to any theatrical performance and, moreover, it denies the spectator-to-spectator communication (in both its positive and negative aspects) within the larger framework of audience as community (1997, p. 84).

Bennett’s views might be considered to be inappropriate to 21st century audience studies, given the diverse new ways audiences can engage art through multiple forms of media and electronic devices that are central to the everyday lives of ordinary people. As discussed earlier in this chapter, current live performances like theatre, dance, concert, and opera utilise digital technologies as tools to expand their performances beyond real live onstage presentations to live broadcasts at cinemas like National Theatre Live, and to recordings of digital theatre which audiences can watch on demand anytime and anywhere on any device that can provide online access to it. In addition, today’s video gamers and internet users behave far differently than ‘old-fashioned’ viewers who were believed to passively sit in front of the television or radio. Many new information and entertainment consumers are much more actively involved in their viewing habits, taking control of their viewing by selecting their favourite content, often using non-sequential viewing practices to view non-linear narratives, leaving comments and even creating their own related content (Burzyńska, 2016). All of these developments contribute to making contemporary audiences more complex.

These changes in audiences has produce new research and thinking about the role of audience relations to creative work. Performance studies show ways that those involved in performance

events, including those that shape everyday life, are always and already performers and spectators. This expands the notion of 'performance' beyond conventional theatres with stages and audience seating. Performance studies integrate concepts from contemporary anthropology, sociology and linguistic philosophy into theatre studies. Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) argues that many performances now are 'postdramatic' – meaning they often involve multimedia and are organized as non-linear events that highlight 'more presence than representation' (Lehmann 2006, p. 85) – and frequently call on audiences to actively participate as co-creators of a production (ibid.). Abercrombie and Longhurst identify similar changes in their book *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (1998) which categorises audiences into three types: simple (watching a live event in one location), mass (watching TV or listening to radio in different locations) and diffused, which means that 'everyone becomes an audience all the time. Being a member of the audience is no longer an exceptional event, nor even an everyday event' (ibid., p.68). The authors further argue that due to advances in communication technologies and media, most audiences today are diffused. Using the notion of 'broad' performance that Richard Schechner describes as 'the broad spectrum of performance includes a whole variety of activity in a whole variety of fields, all performative behaviour' (1993, p. 21, also cited in Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). 'Deeply infused into everyday life is performance that we are unaware of it in ourselves or in others. Life is a constant performance; we are audience and performer at the same time; everybody is an audience all the time' (ibid., p. 73).

Other theatre studies utilise different approaches to audiences (Freshwater, 2009). John Tulloch's *Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production and Reception: Theatrical events and their audiences* (2005) uses the media studies notion of 'audiencing' to explain 'how the cultural frames of education, marketing, and criticism inform responses to productions of Chekhov and Shakespeare. The theory of 'audiencing' proposes that audiences are constructed by institutions, discourses, and interpretive frames' (ibid., p. 32).

The above research shows that even though theatre artists can theoretically use the creative process to communicate what they wish to audiences, more practical attention needs to be paid to audiences. For Freshwater, 'Theatre scholars are, for the most part, interested in how audiences interpret what they have seen, whereas the industry is concerned with ensuring the profitability of its investment and is consequently more interested in why a production appeal and in generalising about patterns of consumption' (2009, p. 30). From the industry side, Liz Hill states that 'art which does not generate audiences will seldom generate revenues, grants or other financial support, whether from box office receipts or funding bodies and sponsors' (2018, p.28). This all underscores that 'audience' is a complicated part of performances that deserves more study.

2.5 Audience study from the viewpoint of the arts industry under the umbrella of the audience development mission

The arts industry can be roughly categorised into two key sectors: non-profit (subsidised organisation) and commercial. Although the mission of expanding their audience presents challenges for arts organisations in both sectors for a variety of reasons, non-profit companies who are funded by taxpayers or through other forms of public support typically aim for various outreach programmes to reach new and broader groups with their creative work. This is based on the idea that the 'general public has the right to feel a sense of ownership of subsidised music, opera, dance, theatre and visual arts' (Walmsley, 2011, p.6). Audience development has become a crucial part of cultural policy in many European countries and in Great Britain since the late 20th century, though broadening access to the arts was part of British cultural policy agenda since the 19th century. A key development in 19th century cultural policy was the establishment of publicly funded cultural institutions¹⁵ like museums and art galleries. This was 'the process whereby art was made part of a public culture and tradition' (Pearson, 1982, p. 24). It aimed to encourage wide accessibility for people of all classes to appreciate refined knowledge and fine aesthetics. (ibid.; Taylor, 1994). Despite this early attention to art accessibility, how it was done varied in each period.

Morison and Dalglish (1993), American arts marketers, highlight how American institutions saw the demand for new audiences as a concern because of 'cultural boom'¹⁶ in the United States between the 1950s and 1970s. Many arts organisations utilised Dynamic Subscription Promotion (DSP) to maintain the loyalty of existing audiences and sell out to subscribers. This tactic did not attract much participation of newcomers. US demographic data on arts audiences confirm this, as the audience profiles in the 1980s and those of the 1950s are strikingly similar, noting that audiences tend to be well-educated, middle class, high income, from a good profession or working at a managerial level. Morison and Dalglish saw how this gap created through DSP tactics may alienate potential attendees due to the privileged membership scheme, so this approach had limits for audience building. Instead, they proposed SELL – Strategy to Encourage Lifelong Learning – as a tool to focus on 'potential or intending' target audiences. This strategy is based the concept and need for 'enrichment' through the arts, for maintaining and developing audiences by maximising the chances for the audience to learn, become involved in and to help establish committed, broad-

¹⁵ In the UK, the national arts councils and local councils play an important role in funding arts organisations. The arts councils 'function as non-governmental quangos of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)' (Walmsley, 2011, p.6).

¹⁶ According to Morison and Dalglish, 'Cultural boom' was a period in the United States (1950s to 1970s) when 'Many people enter into a more active search for other ways to utilize their new freedom. It took many diverse and random directions, including active exploration of self-expression and self-individuation – a basic human need beyond the four requirements for survival. More people than ever before could and did turn toward artistic expression and became artists. More people than ever before could and did participate in the arts as audience members' (1993, p. 12).

mindful and loyal audiences. The concept 'relationship marketing' also evolved in the 1990s as a cornerstone of this approach. As Hayes and Slater point out, 'Fundamental to this paradigm is the acquisition and retention of customers and the recognition that during the lifetime of the relationship, the needs and wants of individuals will change' (2002, p. 3). The SELL approach uses an interdisciplinary approach (i.e., marketing, promotion, publicity, communications, public relations, and educational activities) to audience development. It was the first attempt to promote all these aspects together.

In 1986, the Arts Council of Great Britain commissioned the first large-scale national research to measure public participation in the arts. Since then, most arts organisations in the UK have paid more attention to encouraging people from specific groups in society (e.g., young people, people with learning difficulties and African and Asian communities) to participate in the arts, to expand beyond the middle-aged attenders and the white middle class groups then participating in the UK arts (Maitland, n.d.). In March 1998, the Culture Secretary of the Labour government launched the *New Audiences Fund*, a one-off £5 million initiative for new audience building in the arts which 'identified audience development as a priority' (Roger, 1998, p. 4). Chris Smith highlights the goals:

Our aim is to make things of quality available to the many, not just the few. And I say 'things of quality' advisably, because we must not fall into the trap of assuming that widening the audience for an artistic event or institution necessarily involves diluting the quality or excellence of the experience. It is important to have the twin goals of excellence and access in full view. The two go together; they do not – as some have assumed – contradict each other (1998, pp. 49-50).

Since then, UK arts organisations have enthusiastically experimented with new and exciting ways to develop their audiences. As Kawashima argues, 'audience development seems to be the political flavour of the month in the UK' (2000, p.7). Hayes and Slater likewise highlight how 'Audience development became the mantra of arts and museum practitioners in the latter half of the 1990s and has remained a priority for many organisations...into the twenty-first century' (2002, p. 1). This marked a paradigm shift in the post-war history of public funding for the arts in Britain, turning earlier product-focused approaches centred on professional cultural producers into audience-focused approaches centred on cultural consumption. Although the idea of encouraging accessibility in the arts to more people at the policy level started from a theory of the main goals of arts and cultural funding bodies (ibid.), the debate on audience development practices has become more energised at both the policy level and practice level since then.

2.5.1 What is an 'audience' for audience development?

The term 'audience' can be considered with regard to various meanings and different contexts (Hill et al, 2018). As Machon points out, the word 'audience' has a vexed meaning (2013). Walmsley

likewise argues that 'audience research is plagued by loose, woolly terminology that often perpetuates ambiguity and hinders attempts to cohere a scholarly community around it' (2019, p. 6). Hill, *et al.* classify audiences into three broad categories: audiences as 'arts receptors' (accidental audiences), audiences as 'stakeholders' (including individuals and organisations) and audiences as 'customers'. She highlights the latter approach, which considers their transactional involvement with arts organisations or artists, as the most useful audience aspect for marketeers. 'It implies that most people make choices about the art forms or events that they wish to be involved with and are willing to offer something in return for that participation – often money , but sometimes simply time and involvement. Marketing activity can enhance the value of the exchange process to both parties' (2018, p. 29). Moreover, the Arts Council England also adds to the view of audience as 'customer' as seen in how 'audience' appears in Arts Council England documents to include 'visitors, readers, listeners, viewers, participants, learners, users of a product, and people who buy works of art and publications' (Arts Council England, 2018, p.3).

Consideration of an arts audience as a 'customer' becomes the key approach used in arts marketing. This marketing approach needs to be linked to audiences for the subsidised arts sector, which does not focus on money received directly from customers but on exchanging values (social, educational, personal fulfilment and mental well-being) between arts organisations and the audience. Here, audience development practices used by arts organisations can better consider an 'audience member' as *a person who takes any action to join in the events*. Audiences include not only current customers who engage in the artistic transaction themselves, but also new attendees or participants who decide to leave their homes to attend sponsored events by public funding bodies. These groups of potential attenders could possibly become regular audiences who may return as ticket buyers for art projects in the future. Nevertheless, the involvement of audiences, attenders or participants may be considered either as 'active audience', ready to take part in the work of art or be a part of the creative process that has been offered during the events, or as 'passive audience' who might be loyal and engaged but more likely to enjoy spectating than taking part (Walmsley, 2010, p. 5).

2.5.2 Audience development: objectives and definitions

Audience development in the arts is based on the notion of making the arts extensively accessible by fulfilling both audience needs and the objectives of the arts organisation. Maitland highlights that 'arts and cultural organisations carry out audience development for different reasons. Overall, though, they see developing audiences as a way of achieving their objectives, whether these are artistic, financial, social or all three' (1997, p.7). Of these three objectives, artistic objectives are the main focus of most arts organisations. Since most of them have a mission to create and present something innovative and challenging to the public, developing an audience needs to work on

preparing them for those kinds of new works. One of the main concerns for arts organisations is how to enhance their audience's understanding of the arts. Financial considerations and objectives are also key parts of all arts organisations' goals. This includes not only income derived from ticket sales, but also money from public funds that arts organisations use to develop creative work in a particular style or forms which they then offer to a community or a geographic region. When viewing financial objectives through the lens of audience development, the focus is on enlarging audience numbers, their frequency of attendance, the kind of activities or events they are interested in, and the average amount they are willing to pay for their experiences. Although social objectives do not seem to be the main objectives in arts organisations, some of them may make this type of goal into their mission and activities. It means that other sectors of society (i.e., young people, people with learning difficulties, elderly people, African and Asian communities) should have an opportunity to attend arts events. These social objectives can help arts organisations in their efforts to gain financial support from public sources. On the other hand, some organisations, particularly those doing theatre or live events, can also sell more tickets under a social scheme such as discount tickets for students and young people or discount standby same-day tickets instead of leaving seats empty (ibid.).

Scholars, art marketers and audience development agencies (Morison and Dalglish, 1993; Dodd and Sandell, 1998; Arts Council England, 2018; Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2019; The Audience Agency, 2020) agree that audience development is a long-term and multidimensional process. It seeks to eliminate any barriers of access to arts activities or museum and then to 'building bridges' (Dodd and Sandell, 1998, p.6) to connect diverse group of people and provide access to the arts. It is a 'continual, actively-managed process in which an organisation encourages each attender and potential attender to develop confidence, knowledge, experience and engagement across the full breadth of the artform to meet his or her social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2019). This process will 'help a cultural organisation to achieve its mission, balancing social purpose, financial sustainability and creative ambitions' (The Audience Agency, 2020, p.33). Moreover, the Arts Council England (2018) stresses that audience development 'can include aspects of marketing, commissioning, programming, involvement in decision making, education, customer care and distribution (p.3). This sees audience development as including proactive strategies, tactics, schemes and activities to engage current and potential audiences by increasing the number of new attenders, deepening and widening the range of an art form's appreciation by current audiences. It employs the marketing science as a potential tool to enhance public access to and engagement with the world of art.

Developing audiences has also been tied to socio-economic development. Here the arts and cultural activities are used to promote non-artistic goals such as making the arts more sustainable, producing greater artistic or cultural participation, and by extending access to those who both consume and

participate in artistic and cultural production. In all cases, an audience-centred mindset is central, since it affords a more open-minded, inclusive, and strategic approach to audience-building that can help make arts and culture more accessible to more people (Bamford and Wimmer, 2012). In implementing an audience-focused approach that provides audiences access to the arts, it is crucial to understand the obstacles that keep people from participating in the arts. By understanding barriers to attendance and participation, it is possible to find ways to overcome them. Audience-centred approaches require substantial planning to broaden and enrich individuals' experiences of the arts (Maitland, 1997). Realising such goals requires systemic thinking and planning of effective activities to involve audiences in artistic processes in three main areas: educational work, marketing efforts, and artistic functions, particularly via participatory activities (*ibid.*; Roger, 1998; Hill *et al.*, 2018). The long-term planning required to generate and implement an audience-centred approach to the arts is often neglected or even ignored by all stakeholders. Walmsley has noted how 'audience development is often seen as a challenging task that is under-estimated and under-resourced and regarded as a cost rather than an investment. Worse, it is sometimes even regarded as a set of short-term publicity tactics rather than a long-term strategy to achieve fundamental artistic, financial or social objectives' (2011, p.9). Many artistic organisations in Europe continue to debate the relative value of framing the art-audience relationship around cultural consumption, cultural education, or cultural participation (Bollo *et al.*, 2017; Cuenca-Amigo and Makua, 2017).

To address these issues, it is important to put the audience at the centre of arts organisations in strategic terms that shape the programming and commissioning activities, particularly in the subsidised sector. Marketing approaches matter, but as Theodore Levitt points out, businessmen need to understand that the industry is a customer-satisfying process, not a process of goods production, so it starts with customers and their needs. Therefore, 'given the customer's needs, the industry develops backwards, first concerning itself with the physical delivery of customer satisfaction. Then it moves back further to creating the things by which these satisfactions are in part achieved' (1986). When including an audience-centred approach in marketing operations, Morison and Dalglish argue for more nuance when marketing the arts:

We are not suggesting that cultural enterprises abandon the use of appropriate marketing techniques, but only that the significant differences between marketing commercial products and marketing the arts be recognized and understood so that the arts can avoid going further astray. At the head of this is a recognition of the fundamental difference between goals and methods-between the ends and the means used to accomplish them (1993, p. 66).

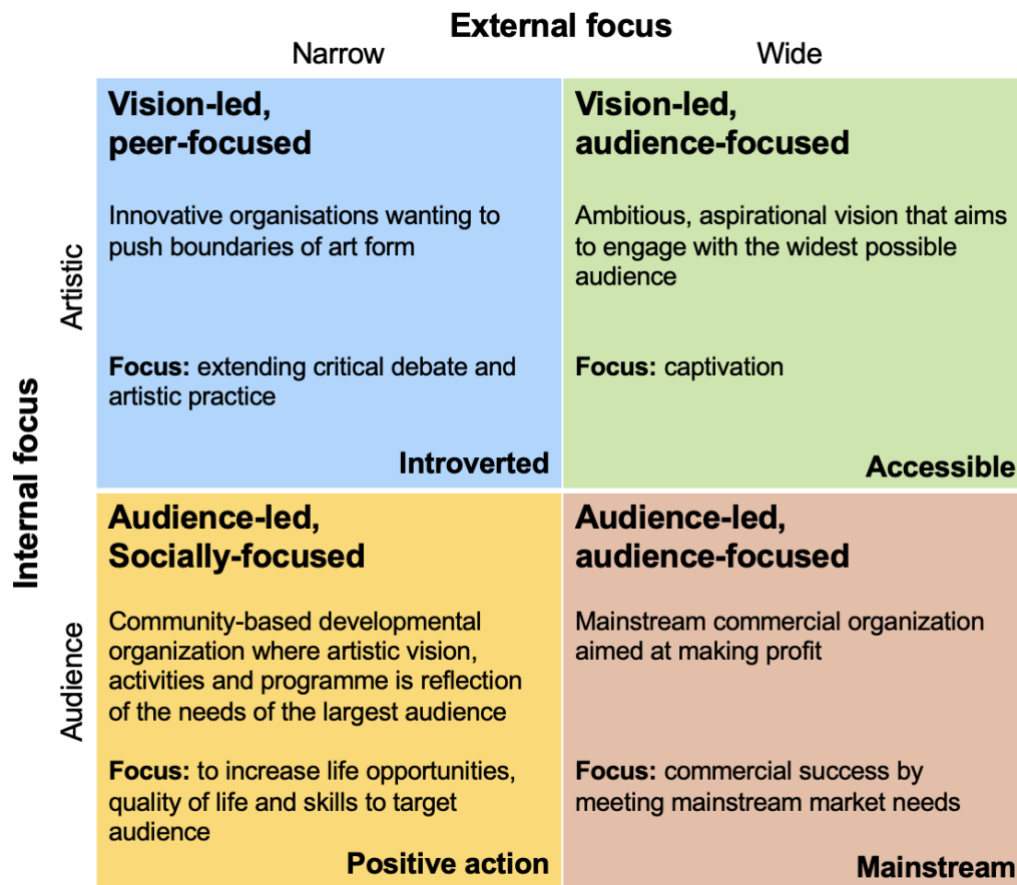
It can be argued that marketing in the artistic world works differently from that in many areas of the general business world and has its own specific characteristics. Since the commercial world aims to

generate profit, or monetary returns on investment, this is an acceptable idea familiar to a world that trusts capitalism and private enterprise. Marketeers promote products and people to their current and potential customers to achieve this goal. Marketing differs in the world of arts in both its goal and in the means of accomplishing it. The goal is to 'build a long-term relationship between people and the product – arts' (ibid., p.66). As Kotler and Scheff (1997) highlight 'it is necessary to explore and discover a harmonious balance between the two ends of the spectrum, a mix that benefits both the suppliers and the consumers of the product. When it is at its best, the artistic decision is well received, even demanded, by the public' (p. 18). Hence 'at its best, the market-centered decision is highly artistic. Along the continuum of art-centered and market-centered choices, the ultimate product is the one in which the two concepts become one' (ibid., p. 18).

Finding a balance between how marketing is used in a business-centred world and an art-centred world challenges all arts organisations. In recent years, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre has explored the key concept of sustainable audience development for arts organisations. Her concept was adapted in a 2x2 Ansoff Matrix analysis known as '*Vision-led, audience-focus*' (2019). This idea encourages arts organisations to create an ambitious, aspirational, artistic vision that aims to engage the widest possible audience as deeply as possible. Besides providing accessibility, it should also seek to captivate audiences and engage with the world (see Figure 3 below). This Ansoff Matrix is a marketing tool for strategic planning used in audience development as a 'framework for devising strategies' (Arts Marketing Association, 2024).

Although arts organisations need to put their audience at the centre of their marketing, they need not address everything that the audience wants in their artistic programming. This concept is normally used in the mainstream commercial entertainment sector, which is seen as *audience-led, audience-focused*. This mainstream approach is commonly understood as a way of using extreme marketing in the entertainment and media industries of Asian countries, whose business companies aim for commercial purposes. Unfortunately, non-profit arts organisations, especially those in Thailand that are the focus here, misunderstand the positive value of marketing for their work. They fail to see marketing as a useful tool and see it as selling their artists soul to the commercial and capitalist market. For them, 'marketing', therefore, is often seen as a hostile and destructive force to the non-profit arts sector.

Figure 3: The concept of audience development
(© Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2019)



To increase broad accessibility with artistic quality, arts organisations should focus on marketing that promotes audience captivation rather than commercial success as the guide for promoting their activities. For a community-based developmental organisation, the model of *audience-led, socially-focused* might be a more appropriate one since this concept helps to emphasise the responsibility of arts organisations for audience development. Though audience development borrows from marketing strategies for its operations, arts organisations must balance their dual need to captivate intrinsic value of the arts and to generate a reasonable monetary return for their organisation's work.

2.5.3 How to develop audiences?

The research of Hayes and Slater (2002) describes audience development as having one of two main foci: either a 'mainstream' or existing audience focus or a 'missionary' or traditional non-attender focus. They suggest that arts organisations need to include both foci and to balance how they develop both groups of audiences in order to achieve a sustainable outcome. They argue that

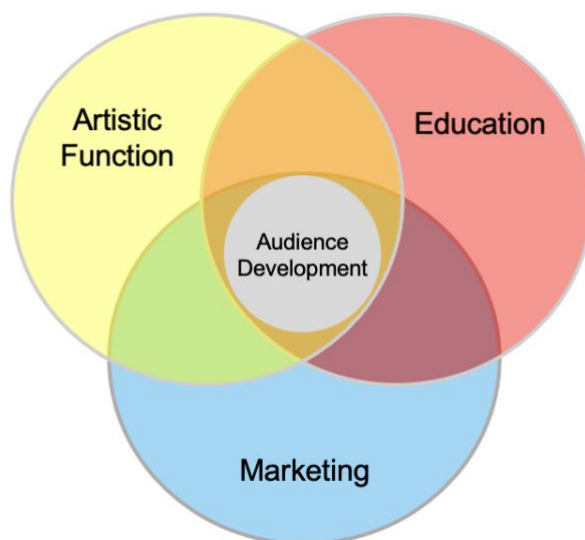
much of the prior literature on audience development falls into one of two types. One type of research considers and discusses audience development's nature and its practices. This research focused mostly on cases that are practice-based, or process-focused (for example, see Morison and Dalgleish, 1993; Mathers and Selwood, 1996; Maitland, 1997; Dodd and Sandell, 1998; Rogers, 1998). A focal point of this research is on 'building bridges' and 'breaking down barriers' for non-attender ('missionary') groups. Hayes and Slater argue that 'the development of traditional attenders, including an organisation's existing audience, appears to be a subordinate function' (2002, p. 2). A second type of research in this area emphasises the attitudes of non-attenders, particularly minority groups, by using qualitative research to strategically see how to reach these non-attenders (for example, see Trevelyan, 1991; Harris Research, 1993; Research Surveys of Great Britain, 1994; Harris Qualitative, 1997; Desai and Thomas, 1998; Jermyn and Desai, 2000).

2.5.4 The synergy of education, artist, and marketing

From a UK perspective, running arts organisations that succeed in audience development requires an efficient and simultaneous use of various functions. Three key areas matter here: education, artistic function/programming, and marketing. These components are needed to nurture arts audiences (Maitland, 1997; Roger, 1998; Hill *et al.*, 2018). The interaction of these three functions can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 4: The synergy of marketing, educational work and artistic function in audience development

(© Maitland, 1997; Roger, 1998; Hill et al., 2018)



The function of education work often concentrates on long-term development for the 'audience of tomorrow' by nurturing an individual's understanding and appreciation of the arts rather than the

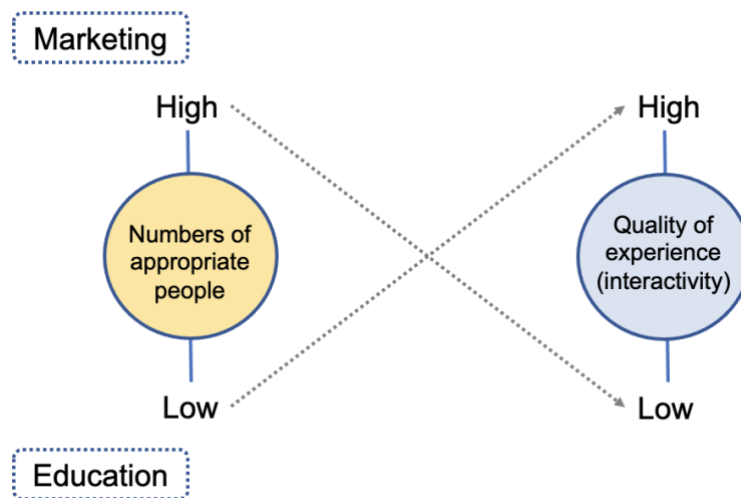
current art audience now (Hill *et al.*, 2018). In the UK, integrating educational work and principals within and across arts organisations was actively used in the ACE's long-term Education Research and Development Initiative (ERDI) that began in 1995. This research was also highlighted earlier in a joint 1992 ACE / Paul Hamlyn Foundation seminar on *Developing New Audiences: the way forward* that saw it as one of many obstacles to efficient audience development, as art in education was then a low priority (Roger, 1998). This early work on audience development in the UK via education shows a government view that education work was crucial to help balance activities centred on artistic value with marketing strategies.

In terms of artistic function, artists or creative teams take part in creating works that are accessible by target segments. Tailoring works of art appropriate to each target group, both new attenders and current audiences, often helps to nurture the right audience mixes for arts organisations. Maitland argues that artists 'wish to bring more people into contact with the work but are often particularly concerned with finding "the right audience" who will best appreciate it' (Maitland, 1997, p. 5).

For marketing the arts, some may see it as a plan to attract a large number of audiences at every event by short-term aims. While this may be true in some respects, it may be wrong to consider education and marketing separately, rather than complementary (Roger, 1998). Promoting projects or efforts that integrate education, artistic work, and marketing can encourage meaningful events or activities for 'sustaining and expanding existing audiences or visitors, creating new attenders and participants, and enhancing their enjoyment, understanding, skills and confidence across the artforms' (Ibid., p. 3). Maitland's (1997) definition of each function highlights the distinct role each has. Those involved in education mainly concentrate on how to develop individuals for each art form by their participatory involvement as well as by attending arts events. Those in marketing looks for outcomes which help arts organisations to reap financial reward. Artists, together with the education team, emphasise 'improving audiences' understanding of their work' (p.5) and make sure that 'the audiences has an understanding and appreciation of their artistic aims' (ibid.).

In addition, while working with education might be done alone, but it is impossible for audience development to work without education. The collaboration of education and marketing will help to deepen and broaden the range of groups with access to the arts (Roger, 1998). In his 'Qualitative research into attendance at new and contemporary film and theatre at Warwick Arts Centre' Robert argues that educational work and marketing work are deeply interconnected. While marketing can help increase people's involvement in the arts, it cannot provide a deep experience of the arts. This disadvantage of marketing can be fulfilled by educational functions that help deepen the experience of participants, but education itself normally relates to small numbers. Therefore, both approaches are crucial in building an impact of the arts (Roberts, 1997). See Figure 5 below for details.

Figure 5: The interrelation of marketing and education approaches in audience development
(© Roberts, 1997 in Maitland, n.d.)



2.5.5 Models of Audience Development

Academics have developed different approaches to audience development. Nobuko Kawashima (2000) identifies four types of audience development: Cultural Inclusion, Extended Marketing, Taste Cultivation, and Audience Education (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: Different Types of Audience Development
(© Kawashima, 2000)

	1.Cultural inclusion	2.Extended marketing	3.Taste cultivation	4.Audience education
Target	People least likely to attend, e.g., low income	Potential attender, lapsed attender	Existing audience	Existing audience
Form	Outreach	The same product offered, but with improvement to cater for the target	Introduction to different art forms and genres	The same product offered with extensive education
Purpose*	Social	Financial, artistic	Artistic, financial (and educational)	Educational (and financial)

*Only refers to the main one(s), but not excluding the others

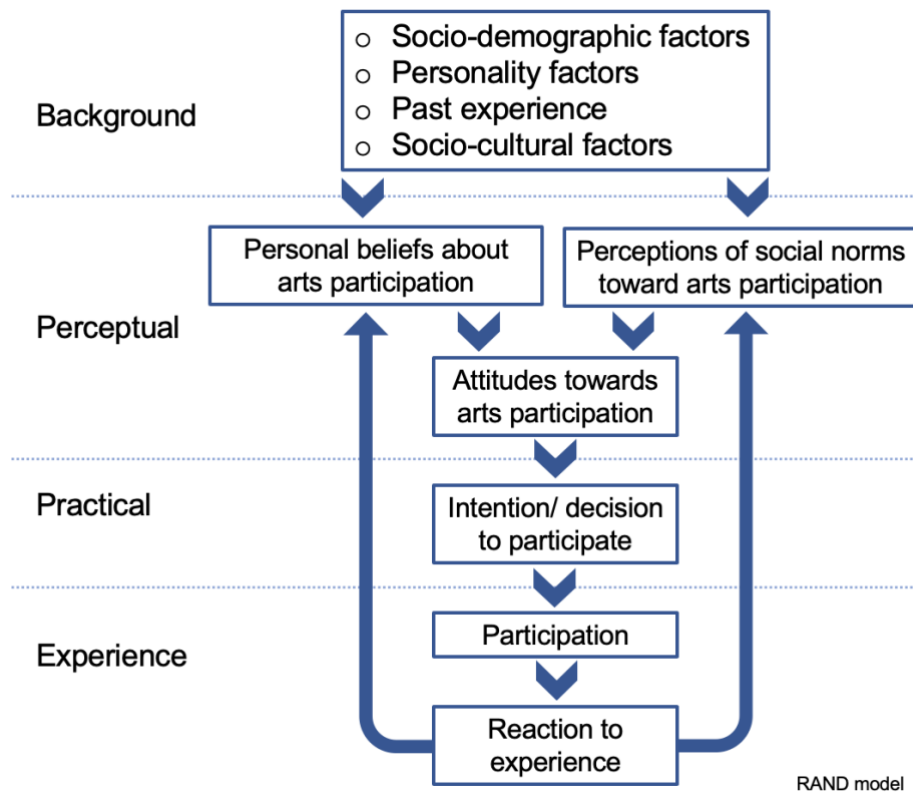
This categorisation shows the varied purposes, processes, and practices used to boost arts involvement among different target groups. The starting point of all these approaches is not the

cultural product but the interests, needs, experiences and level of knowledge of attenders, as is especially clear in Cultural Inclusion. The other three categories, Maitland argues, 'are products of a desire to make culture more widely available where the product is seen as inherently good in itself' (n.d., p. 4) as these three focus on potential and existing audiences. Unlike the other three types, Cultural Inclusion approaches a new target as a group in need of investment, which requires much time, energy and budgeting. This focus may result in a lower return on investment compared to projects that aim to develop potential or existing target audiences.

Arts Marketing Association (2001) in the UK encourages arts organisations to employ market segmentation approaches in theory and practice to increase their attenders, but some arts marketing consultant companies have created their own audience development know-how. As examples, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre and The Audience Agency both employ the idea of market segmentation to create their own systems of segmenting arts and culture audiences. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre has developed a 'Culture Segments' approach which is 'a powerful psychographic profiling system that helps cultural organisations build relationships with audiences across every facet of their operation' (2024). The Audience Agency has launched 'Audience Spectrum' to segment 'the UK population by their attitudes towards culture and by what they like to see and do' (2024). Both organisations seek to segment target groups according to their cultural attitudes. These culturally based systems differ from general marketing systems that usually segment customers by residence area or postcode (demographics), by each stage of life (children, adolescents, mid-career people, etc.) or by behaviour (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2024). These new audience segmenting systems have been developed by interdisciplinary experts such as data scientists, statisticians, psychologists, and computer software engineers, as well as artists, arts researchers, and arts managers. Nonetheless, both consultant companies have invested effort and money to create distinctive systems to support their client arts organisations and museums. They develop know-how and proprietary systems for gathering and interpreting data on people's attitudes and then apply them to cultural segments.

Somewhat differently, as noted in Hadley (2021), McCarthy and Jinnett (2001, p. xi) explored the three-stage RAND participation model (see Figure 7) on how to increase audience participation. They first consider problems in extant research literature in audience development to focus on how to encourage audience participation. They identify two problems in previous research. Firstly, it often oversimplifies the process each audience takes in its decision making about attending the arts and fails to consider other aspects that might influence the audience in each phase of that journey. Secondly, it emphasises socio-demographics, which arts organisations cannot influence, rather than focusing on audience participatory behaviour, i.e., attitudes and motivation.

Figure 7: RAND participation model
(©McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001, p.24)



McCarthy and Jinnett argue that the decision to attend an event is a process that may be divided into three stages, with each stage influenced by different factors. The background stage looks to common viewpoints on the arts of the individual, influenced by socio-demographics, past experiences in the arts, personal circumstances, and socio-cultural factors. This forms an individual's predisposition to attend the arts events in stage 1 and leads to how they are affected by perceptual factors, i.e., individual beliefs on costs and benefits, and perception of viewpoint on the arts from reference group. In stage 2, each practical factor leads to evaluating definite attendance occasions. Then, for the actual attendance, the reaction to the real experience and the retrospective assessment of an individual's inclination to attend occurs in stage 3. This model also suggests the necessity of an institution's goal for participation that organisations need to consider when designing strategies for developing audiences. McCarthy and Jinnett highlight three types of objectives for the target population of arts organisation: 1) Diversifying goals to attract new targets/markets 2) Broadening goals to attract new/potential attenders from the existing market 3) Deepening goals to encourage the level of involvement on its current attenders. To effectively implement most strategies requires that each type of objective is developed with specific tactics and planning (2001).

Wiggins analysis of the RAND model identifies two main weaknesses: 'it does not take into account multiple barriers to participation at the different stages, and it does not capture the potential for a

marketing strategy to impact on multiple audience segments' (2004, p. 23). Wiggins produced what he called the Motivation/ Ability/ Opportunity model - MAO, which supposes that an attender or non-attender is faced with three barriers: Motivation/ Ability/ Opportunity when deciding on participation. He provides a more specific method of art market segmentation and shows the complexities of multiple segments that may occur. Stokmans (2005) criticises some vague points in the MAO model, particularly its unclear description of the procedure to cluster market segments. Hadley points out how this phenomenon was stressed by McCarthy and Jinnett-Wiggins-Stokmans: 'this progression within the literature exemplifies and reflects the emergence of audience development and how the twin strands of theoretical and applied research intermeshed as the field developed' (2021, p.66).

In the end, when arts organisations apply any models for their audience development projects, they face a fundamental problem, as Maitland argues, namely that 'the term audience development is problematic because it encourages arts organisations and funding bodies to prescribe and apply a single undifferentiated approach and a single set of benchmarks for the assessment and evaluation of audience development projects. This is why we need to take a rigorous approach to planning audience development projects; only then can we be clear on what we are trying to achieve, who we want to get involved with and how they will benefit' (n.d., p. 4).

2.6 Current arts audience research in Thailand: an analysis from an international perspective

The above literature review has highlighted two main types of research:

- 1) audience studies by academic scholars in theatre and performance studies focusing on psychology, education and humanities research on an art engagement approach or art experience.
- 2) audience research from the perspective of the arts and cultural industries, under the umbrella of an audience development mission based on arts marketing and behavioural economics.

Each type of research focuses on different dimensions of the audience, with Freshwater pointing out the different motivations for considering audiences in the theatre industry and academic world. She argues 'theatre scholars are, for the most part, interested in how audiences interpret what they have seen, whereas the industry is concerned with ensuring the profitability of its investment and is consequently more interested in why a production appeal and in generalising about patterns of consumption' (2009, p. 30). For the latter group, audience research from arts and cultural industries or arts organisations, audience development is a crucial mechanism for their survival, both in the

short term (e.g., increasing ticket sales or finding an audience to fill in all seats) and in the long term (nurturing current or potential audiences and building newcomers to appreciate the world of arts). To ensure their survival, all arts organisations require money or financial support. What matters is the source of funding and how it helps encourage and shape audience development practices.

Artistic work in the current global arena have two traditional sources of financial support, depending on the social structure and the arts ecosystem concerned in each country or region. Morison and Dalglish offer an American view on funding sources for the arts from a western historical perspective.

Throughout the history of Western civilization, kings, princes, dukes, other nobility and merchants of wealth were the central patrons of great art. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the Church became a major source of largesse as well. At times, the state bestowed support upon artists, and in Europe during the past century, the state has become a primary patron. But in the United States, wealthy individuals were the backbone of patronage, and this continued through the setting and maturing of our country (1993, p. 13).

They identify the state or central government as the primary patron in a public support system and the private or individual support system as two traditional financial support systems for the arts that still exist today.

In the United States, the private system of support for the arts has played an important role since the early nineteenth century which continued with greater vigour, as indicated by Morison and Dalglish, 'with the explosive industrial growth after the civil war, business entrepreneurs built incredible fortunes with breathtaking speed and soon became the ruling patrons of the arts. Author Alvin Toffler calls them the *tycoon-patron*. The Morgans, Rockefellers, Carnegies, Pulitzars, Mellons, Corcorans, Fricks, Guggenheims, Havermeyers, Higinsons, Hearsts and dozens of other millionaires like them became the new American Medicis' (ibid., p.14). A remarkable shift occurred in the 1970s, when government funding was expected to work on a businesslike model, and corporations funded the arts. 'The arts were being politicised through a process by which the new bureaucrat-patron sensitised the artists, managers and trustees to the needs and demands of a broader, less personal [and] more pragmatic constituency. The arts were being asked to be *businesslike*, and this turned out to be a mixed blessing' (ibid., p.16). This helps explain why notions of audience development for the arts in the United States focus on marketing as a magic tool for the survival of arts organisations. This is seen in the DSP-Dynamic Subscription Promotion, SELL-Strategy to Encourage Lifelong Learning and the RAND model as mentioned earlier in this chapter and is seen in the emphasis on customer relations management. These strategies adapt business

marketing and management methods for use in arts organisations (Olsen, 2002; Decker, 2017; Dobrzynski, 2017; Sayed, 2018).

By contrast, the UK, some European countries and Singapore rely on a system whereby the state is the primary patron for the arts. Strikingly, while the UK has used cultural policy to become one of the most active countries in encouraging audience development in the arts and cultural sector, it has faced many dilemmas on this journey. Hadley argues that policies aside, 'a more meaningful understanding of audience development has been obscured by a focus on conceptualising and defining the practice as a tool of marketing management' (2021, p.19).

In the late 1990s, as audience development emerged in a policy driven plan in the UK, building a new target audience became the focus, while the audience development know-how was just introduced to the arts and cultural sector. These developments generated many confusions and debates about actual practices among arts organisations, particularly in the theatre sector. Finding a balanced way to develop existing audiences and new target audiences was highly contested. The introduction of marketing strategies into the subsidised arts and cultural sector was also often opposed by many art elites and practitioners.

As an example of audience development in the arts in Southeast Asia, Singapore largely follows the UK model in its arts and cultural policy advocacy. The National Arts Council of Singapore (NAC) is key to fostering art activities. In the recent SG Arts Plan (2018-2022), arts and cultural projects were to be guided by eight priorities set forward by NAC. Audience development is identified as the second priority of national action as to 'increase focus on growing audiences' (Government of Singapore, 2022a). The Singaporean government has supported theatre organisations to build a new generation of performers by focusing on the Theatre for Young Audiences sector (The Artground, for example) and it believes that 'experiencing the magic of theatre from a young age sets the foundation for lifelong engagement. It develops supporters of the arts in the long run, whether as audiences or patrons, while some might become practitioners' (ibid., 2022b). The National Arts Council of Singapore also provides funding, in its Market and Audience Development Grant, for projects that increase audiences, patrons and supporters to promote artistic endeavours both domestically and internationally. This grant is available to both individuals and groups or organisations (ibid., 2022c).

This state-led system for subsidising the arts has led to research on audience development that differs from studies in the United States. Normally studies centre on qualitative methods to understand audience as an individual and are based on humanities, cultural studies and theatre sociology (Gourdon, 1992; Shoham, 1992; Schoenmakers, 1992; Reason, 2006; Pitts and Price, 2021). For research on cultural policy perspectives, Hadley points out that most previous literatures on audience development 'have mostly adopted a case study and archival research approach --

have therefore resulted in a process-based conceptualising of audience development which occluding significant features of the practice of audience development itself' (2021, p.19).

In countries where the state subsidises the arts, it is common to survey art consumption or participation. This is seen in the UK's Taking Part Survey, which gathers information on how the arts and culture industry is experienced by both adults and children (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2021). Similar surveys include the EU Cultural Participation Survey (Eurostat, 2021), the Survey of Cultural Participation and Cultural Needs in Barcelona (Barcelona Institute of Culture and Barcelona City Council, 2020), The National Arts Participation Survey (Australia Council for the Arts, 2021), New Zealand's cultural participation in 2020 and future participation in a post-COVID environment (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2021), Singapore's National Music Consumption Survey, 2017 and 2019 (Government of Singapore, 2022d), Singapore's Theatre Survey, 2018 (ibid., 2022e), and Singapore's Population Survey on the Arts 2019 (ibid., 2022f).

Regarding academic and cultural policy in Thailand, whether in historical documents or research on Thai arts and culture, most focus on political institutions, identifying the monarchy (royal court) and government as the main patrons/promoters/producers/creators for traditional arts or state promoted art genres. A popular historical period for Thai theatre research is after the 1932 revolution ending absolute monarch and often focuses on the work of the nationalist figure Luang Wichitwathakarn. He was not only the first director of the Fine Arts Department, but also a nationalist playwright in the regimes of Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram. The Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram directed Wichitwathakarn to create theatre pieces to help strengthen his nationalist ideology for the public as part of modern nation building agenda for Thailand.

The analysis of Luang Vichit Vadakan's historical plays (1980) by Pra-onrat Buranamat was an early work which conducted textual analyses of historical plays and the influences of socio-political in that period to illustrate how literature and society are connected and mirror each other. Jiraporn Witayasakpan's *Nationalism and the transformation of aesthetic concepts: Theatre in Thailand during the Phibun period* (1992) is a useful study for this research, tracking the interrelationship between Phibunsongkhram's nationalism and aesthetic change in Thai theatre of the period. Though it does not consider theatre audiences, it helps to illustrate the political landscape of Thainess exercised by Thai government and its influence on Thai theatre at that time. The study interestingly suggests that 'those who control hegemonic leadership in the society can claim high artistic standards as they themselves define official artistic criteria' (1992, p. 23).

In addition, Kusuma Prasertsud's *Luang Vichitr Vadakarn: The use of theatre for propaganda* (1998) is an in-depth example of theatre studies complementing the works of Buranamat (1980) and Witayasakpan (1992). Prasertsud analyses of 27 propaganda plays and highlights how these plays

worked to indoctrinate the public with state ideology of the time. Another useful work is *Traditional and Transformation of Thai Classical Dance: Nation, (Re) invention and Pedagogy* (2016) of Pawinee Boonserm, which examines the influence of socio-political context and cultural policy on Thai theatre of the period. Boonserm emphasises the project of cultural revivalism in the second regime of Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, which shifted from focusing on Thai western-based propaganda theatre to traditional performing arts, especially court forms. This institutional revival led to the newly invented traditions from nearly lost court forms and related rituals by the Fine Arts Department and embodied this revival of new forms as a 'classicalism' that 'become the standard and has been passed on to succeeding generations in the new educational system. These new invented traditions were preserved as if they were sacred, a practice which continues to the present' (Boonserm, 2016, p. 2). Today's Thai classical performing arts are core national representations of Thainess but emerged as newly invented revivals as part of a political strategy to create a new Thai state rooted in a classically rich and historically deep past.

Aside from the above research on the Phibunsongkhram's period, there is an interesting study in the area of Public Administration by Piyapa Sangkatabtimsang, *How Thai classical dance and music make Thai nation: Thainess and cultural policies from the perspective of civil servants in the Office of Performing Arts, Ministry of Culture* (2019). This research explores the contemporary Thai state's performing artists through in-depth interviews with state's artists to argue that organisational culture and conventional training processes have indoctrinated performing artists to accept the hegemonic discourse of national Thai traditions. Performing artists within the state system have been physically and psychologically reconfigured by this hegemonic system to reproduce the state's ideology of Thainess. Sangkatabtimsang's study suggests that there is some tacit resistance among state artists influenced by globalised social changes that led to some renegotiation of what Thai traditions are in their practice and also administration: 1) performance modification to be contemporary while remaining traditional in its essence and 2) organisational operations and policies for managing practical and reasonable manpower, budget and welfare. Nonetheless, these renegotiations are still nascent, occurring at an individual level, and it is still difficult to voice this issue in any collective way (Sangkatabtimsang, 2019).

Academic research in Thai contemporary performing arts has primarily focused on the artists, their know-how and methods of artistic practice and creation, mostly related to performance studies, cultural studies and history. Among these works are Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn's *Kamron Gunatilaka and the Crescent Moon Theatre: contemporary Thai theatre as political dissent* (2010); Pattra Toburin's *Freedom of the performing arts, presenting political issues after the 2014 coup: case studies, Crescent Moon Theatre and B-floor theatre* (2017); Pornrat Damrhung's *Performance research seen through the lens of cultural ecology: A case study of an innovative production at*

Chiang Mai's Lanna wisdom school (2020); Phakamas Jirajarupat and Nataporn Rattanachaiwong's *Leh Laweng: Reinventing "Lakhon Phanthang" hybrid dance theatre in a post-traditional style* (2020); Lowell Skar's *Playing with practice theory: Preliminary remarks on the work of performance ecologies in 21st century Bangkok* (2020); Pachaya Akkapram's *The impact of the Sinsai Roo Jai Ton project on the development of local culture and contemporary performance in Northeastern Thailand* (2020) and Khalid Midam's *Connecting faith through theatre: Barazan'yee as a semi-ritual performance in Thai Muslim communities* (2021) as well as parts of the new book Pornrat Damrhung and Lowell Skar's *Lives in Motion: Celebrating Dance in Thailand* (2024).

Since investigation into audience-related issues is largely absent in arts and culture studies in Thailand, the audience is invisible. Thai audience research in the arts and culture sector is very new and uncommon in academic circles. Recent theatre research includes Dangkamon Na-pombejra's project in theatre directing, 'Confronting Otherness through Theatre: On Directing the Merchant of Venice for Thai Audiences' (2021), which aims to deepen the meaning of *venich vanija* (เวนิช วาณิช), the Thai version of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, by challenging audiences to confront otherness. He utilised a series of alienation effects such as using a predominantly female cast, a grotesque modern fairy-tale design, a unique traverse set design for the stage, actresses performing male roles with effeminate male outfits and integrating various acting techniques, while still concentrating on the main themes of the play. Through this performance, this otherness was transformed to allies in the audience's perception. This is a case of contemporary theatre that studies an impact of performance on audience reception in the field of performance studies and practices.

When considering audience difficulties in the Thai contemporary arts scene from another academic standpoint, one work on the Thai arts audience, 'การรับ การเสพ และการบริโภคงานศิลปะ [*Arts Reception, Appreciation, Consumption*]' compiled talks involving scholars in literature, visual arts, music and performing arts in terms of arts criticism as part of the research project 'Criticism as an Intellectual Force in Contemporary Society' led by the scholar Chetana Nagavajara and his research team with support from the Thailand Research Fund. It was presented on 30th March 2006, at Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre's annual meeting in Humanities (Kamsorn, 2006). This collection provides a humanities' perspective of critics and researchers on audience's reception, appreciation and consumption. It focuses on the role of critics and the power of criticism to help enhance arts receptors or consumers' appreciation of the intrinsic value of the arts, rather than examining the complex influences of commercial marketing strategies. It offers a polarised view of mainstream or commercial arts and non-mainstream arts as a black and white distinction based on their perceived artistic values, which seems at odds with how and why people encounter performances today. However, the perspective presented in this book reflects the real landscape of

the arts industry in Thailand, where the relationship between mainstream and non-mainstream sector seems to be binary and hostile, rather than mutual and supportive.

When it comes to the Thai government's perspective on audiences, only one study seems relevant. A research database (between 2006 and 2017) by the OCAC, Ministry of Culture includes a study that focused on the impact of trends and influences on the aesthetic experience of audiences in contemporary art and cultural centres (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2017b). Of the approximately 900 research projects from all around Thailand financed by the Department of Cultural Promotion, the Ministry of Culture of Thailand, none focused on any audience-related topic (Thamkulangkool, 2021). This shows how audiences are not yet considered vital or relevant as a topic of study. Currently, the concern about audiences for Thai contemporary performing arts has led to some active movement by new generation. The Thai Theatre Foundation (TTF) was officially registered in 2019 as a charitable organisation in the state of New York under 501(c)(3) US law and it launched an annual survey of theatre goers and theatre makers survey from 2020. Though this has a limited scale and scope due to its limited budget and workforce, they have made a great pioneering effort to create data-driven overview of the contemporary performing arts sector by collecting information both from theatre makers and audiences (Thai Theatre Foundation, 2022). The work of the TTF began with its own budget, with some support from private agencies rather than from state agencies. TTF recently published a report about the number of contemporary theatregoers in Bangkok metropolitan area, providing a rough measure of the average number of urban theatregoers by following TTF statistics' median value of about 60,000 to 70,000 audiences (Thai Theatre Foundation, 2023b). The TTF also produces annual data of theatregoers and theatre makers via annual surveys since 2020, showing that theatregoers who actively responded to the TTF's questionnaire were aged between 18 and 50 years old and averaged 28 years old (Thai Theatre Foundation, 2022).

Despite the limited research on arts audiences in Thailand, one study, Thamkulangkool's *Audience Development in Thai Contemporary Theatre and Dance: A Study of the Barriers to Audience-Building* (2021), reveals that many contemporary Thai theatre and dance companies, normally run by artists, tend to stress their performance-making processes more than their relations to potential audiences or their organisation and management practices. This production-focused emphasis by artists often neglects dynamic interactions between artists and audiences and also undervalues the co-productive role of audiences in developing artistic performances and programs. The inattentiveness of many theatre and dance companies to their current and potential audiences and to strategies in building and developing audiences is commonplace and underscores a major gap between many arts organisations and audiences in Thailand (ibid.). The COVID-19 pandemic also widened this gap even further.

This situation which is tough on artist-run organisations echoes the real management constraints of Thailand's non-mainstream contemporary performing arts troupes, as they have to work with limited budgets and maintain their organisations in order to survive both in terms of production quality and income. Due to limitations posed by cost control and a need to balance individual projects for long-term survival, it is not surprising that they could not afford sufficient administrative staff or research on their audiences. These predicaments keep them from addressing issues about management and audience development, since they prioritise finding money to make the current and next production and earning a living.

All methods of audience development discussed above: the UK's model of audience development: the synergy of marketing, educational work and artistic function (Maitland, 1997; Roger, 1998; Hill *et al.*, 2018); Kawashima's different types of Audience Development (2000); the concept of audience development (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2019); the American Rand Model (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001); the Motivation/ Ability/ Opportunity model – MAO by Wiggins (2004); and DSP-Dynamic Subscription Promotion; SELL- Strategy to Encourage Lifelong Learning (Morison and Dalglish, 1993) may be workable in Thailand, provided there are two supporting conditions. Firstly, Thai non-mainstream contemporary theatre organisations have sufficient funds to start exploring their own audience development plans, comparable to a commercial organisation that needs to have its own administration and marketing teams to expand their customer base. Since the groups are in non-mainstream troupes with limited budgets, it is a challenge to develop a way to maintain its sustainability in a long term. This issue leads to the second condition, where the Thai government or other public funding agencies should consistently invest some budget as part of a long-term policy to create an environment which fosters future audiences, as seen in the UK model. Unfortunately, neither condition seems possible in Thailand at present. The real situation is more complex and money to support this type of work seems scarce for performing arts organisations.

The above gap between contemporary performing arts organisations and audiences is matched by a gap in the funding system of the Thai government for contemporary artistic and cultural activities. This system has been inadequate and incapable of bridging the gap between cultural production and audiences, again largely because of its neglect of the audience's crucial role in shaping workable cultural policies. Here, too, the effects of COVID-19 have also highlighted this gap and further signalled that the current Thai funding system may not be sustainable. Most of the government's budget for cultural activities are earmarked for traditional arts and culture as part of maintaining national heritage. Although Thailand's Ministry of Culture launched the OCAC in 2002, its funding system normally distributes support on a project-by-project basis, with few longer-term grants. This system challenges even the best-managed cultural groups to develop stable organisational management structures since it keeps them from planning more than a year or two in advance. This

cultural precarity faced by contemporary arts leads to management approaches that are both uncreative and unsustainable, even for otherwise well-run companies. If young artists want to establish their own group or company, they must put their own money up front as capital and hope for occasional future support from unstable, inconsistent and irregular government funding. Officially, Thailand has a state function, the Ministry of Culture, to support arts and culture as mentioned above, but contemporary arts organisations and artists are still sceptical about an efficient support system from the government. Arts organisations still need sustainability and attainable financial support from the government; they may need to take a more realistic view of their finances.

Another problem is confusion over the meaning of the term 'contemporary' for performers and the general public. Few have a clear view of what 'contemporary' performing arts are. Because some contemporary performing arts forms, such as modern spoken plays, musicals, physical theatre, contemporary dance, mime, cabaret, ballet, and opera, are controversial in terms of how they represent Thainess, there is an ambiguity about how new forms (modern or contemporary), influenced by other nations, relate to being Thai. Thai elements are evident when artists adapt or re-create their contemporary performance from Thai traditional techniques, stories or forms; for example, if artists create contemporary *khon* (mask dance-drama), audiences can still perceive it as having some component indicating Thainess. But contemporary works that are new, such as spoken plays or musicals, and that do not obviously show some recognised features of Thai traditional performance cultures are deemed as non-Thai, western-influenced works, even though those works were created by Thai artists and creative teams who were born and brought up in Thailand. To explore these predicaments, this thesis discusses the problematic concept of Thainess in contemporary performing arts from different perspectives or gazes – those of viewers, artists and the state.

It is difficult to receive substantial corporate sponsorship or other private financial support for arts and cultural organisations. Because art is seen as leisure and luxury, most corporations and businesses choose not to donate money to fulfil some artist's dream, but prefer supporting projects in education, health services, Buddhist temples or religious purposes for merit making or corporate social responsibility (CSR). It is hard to relate traditional financial support system for the arts in Thailand to either the UK model with state patronage or the American model of private or individual support.

Although the investigation into audience development in this chapter may not seem to be directly applicable to the Thai case, this review can help locate the current position of Thailand in the roadmap of how to develop Thai audiences in the future. That is, the state of audience development mirrors the constraints that non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector in Thailand is currently facing. For non-mainstream organisations to use these reflections on audience

development in growing their contemporary performing arts audiences, they first need to understand the constraints before removing them and utilising this information. Major barriers may need to be reduced as a first step before moving onto strategies for audience development.

Given the neglected importance and great potential significance of audiences for the contemporary performing arts in Thailand, it is somewhat surprising to see the lack of academic and government research or perspectives on the role of audiences in the Thai arts and cultural system. To help make audiences central to arts and cultural development, especially to develop Thai contemporary performing arts and its audience, the above critical review of audience study and audience development suggests gaps that are worth considering and filling. The literature review helped to clear the ground for the research questions posed in chapter 1.

To identify how the thesis will consider these questions, the next chapter will clarify the research design, chosen methodologies, data collection process and analysis chosen for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to explore the challenges faced by contemporary performing artists and all stakeholders' experience of this art form in Thailand. It consists of six sections, starting from research design and philosophical issues, before moving on to detailing the specific methodology, data collection process, research limitations and data analysis. The chapter ends by considering constraints related to data collection and research ethics.

3.1 From philosophical issues to research design

Social research is tied to ontology and epistemology. Ontology concerns the philosophy of being and the nature of reality which can be captured through qualitative research. 'Ontology is discussed in terms of beliefs about the existence of some universal truth and about objectivity' (Spencer, Pryce and Walsh, 2014, p. 82). Leavy maintains that 'ontology is a philosophical belief system about the nature of the social world... Our ontology belief system informs both our sense of the social world and, correspondingly, what we can learn about it and how we can do so' (2014, p.12). On the other hand, epistemology considers how ones knows and learns about the world, that is the process of knowing (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014), 'how do we gain knowledge of what exists and the relationship between the knower -- in this case the researcher -- and the world' (Spencer, Pryce and Walsh, 2014, p. 82).

A paradigm provides the philosophical structure of research as a framework or worldview that filters knowledge. 'It is a foundational perspective carrying a set of assumptions that guides the research process... Paradigms become the lenses through which research is conceived and executed and thus they are often difficult to see... Ontological and epistemological belief systems are joined in paradigms' (Leavy, 2017, pp. 11-12). Social research has many paradigms that filter and frame its study, and its practitioners may name and group paradigms differently. This research considers the six types of paradigm named by Leavy: 1) postpositivism, 2) interpretive/constructivist, 3) critical, 4) transformative, 5) pragmatic and 6) arts-based/aesthetic intersubjective (2014, p. 12).

This study considers these six paradigms based on qualitative approach, and two main paradigms that qualitative researchers commonly employ, namely interpretive/constructivist and critical (Leavy, 2017). Finding the appropriate paradigm for this research will require a discussion of the two terms 'interpretive/constructivist' and 'critical'.

Interpretive/constructivist refers to how a 'belief system is developed in disciplinary contexts in the social sciences and emphasises people's subjective experiences, which are grounded in social-

historical contexts' (Leavy, 2017, p. 13). Interpretivism/constructivist approaches investigate 'how people engage in processes of constructing and reconstructing meanings through daily interactions... attention is drawn to people's patterns of interaction and the interpretive process by which they assign meanings to events, situations and so forth... working with this paradigm, you are prioritising subjective understandings and multiple meanings in the research process' (Leavy, 2017, p. 129). By contrast, the belief system of a critical paradigm grows out of the interdisciplinary environment and focuses on power-rich contexts, dominant discourses and social justice issues (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Klein, 2000; Leavy, 2011). It prioritises 'the experiences and perspectives of those forced to the peripheries of a hierarchical social order, and they reject grand theories that disavow or erase differences' (Leavy, 2017, p. 13). Under the umbrella of this worldview are a wide range of aspects: feminist, critical race, queer, indigenous, postmodernist, and post structuralist theories (ibid.).

As noted above, this research employs qualitative approaches based on an interpretive/constructivist paradigm. Qualitative research is 'a naturalistic, interpretative approach concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to actions, decisions, beliefs, values, and the like within their social world, and understanding the mental mapping process that respondents use to make sense of and interpret the world around them' (The Office for National Statistics, 2003 cited in Maitland, 2009, p.3). Besides, when the primary goal of the research is to explore, explain, or describe, Leavy points out that 'the values underlying qualitative research include the importance of people's subjective experiences and meaning-making processes and acquiring a depth of understanding (i.e., detailed information from a small sample)' (2017, p.9). Qualitative research offers a 'richer and more in-depth understanding of the population under study. Techniques such as interviews and focus groups allow the research participants to give very detailed and specific answers' (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009, p.8). Nonetheless, this approach also has some disadvantages, such as small sample sizes and non-randomness, and as Vanderstoep and Johnston observe, 'the findings may not generalize to the larger population from which the sample was drawn. Furthermore, since the samples are often non-random, the people who participate may not be similar to the larger population' (ibid.). When considering some disadvantages of this approach, this study will consider carefully the process of sample selection, particularly with regard to audience data collection, in order to be able to represent most of the population as much as possible.

Designed to collect data from primary sources and examine the efficient methodology, this research starts with examining historical documents, policy documents (as illustrated in section 3.2.1 below) to support the various dimensions of analysis of the primary qualitative data. The study opts to

conduct interviews, utilising two key practices used in qualitative research: in-depth interviews and focus groups.

For qualitative research, it may be a challenge to gain in-depth perspectives and fruitful insights into target participants (Bexter, 2009). In-depth interviews are normally inductive, that is open-ended, not true-or-false questions, and range from semi-structured to unstructured. Participants can express themselves in their own language and thus have the freedom to elaborate, give long explanations, or to interact in any way as responding to a researcher's questions (Leavy, 2017). Focus groups are very useful for exploring 'the hidden drivers critical to decision making and exploring the nature of your audience's relationship with your organisation which they might not be cognitively aware of. Scientists generally agree that up to 95% of decision making emanates from the unconscious mind...Focus groups are more like a submarine exploring the submerged depths, shining a light on the previously hidden, "mining" for insights' (Bexter, 2009, p.6-7).

Given the pros and cons of the above methods, the in-depth interview is the most appropriate method to gather primary data from key stakeholders in arts and culture in Thailand. Focus groups, meanwhile, will be suitable to collect data from audiences. The details of each method will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

3.2 Research methodology and data collection processes

This research aims to gain insights and quality information from participants, listening for the hidden aspects underlying the opinions of informants rather than assembling a vast quantity of facts. A quantitative research method can also provide much information using questionnaires (i.e. street surveys, surveys at theatre foyer during the show), but since it is less time-consuming and an unstructured convention in approaching participant, it does not provide an opportunity for a deep conversation with participants that would allow more nuanced and specific details relevant for this research.

Therefore, to address the research questions from well-round perspectives, this study developed a way to collect both secondary data and primary data to help validate well-rounded results. After conducting desk research on secondary data, namely documents and records on Thailand's arts and culture history and cultural policies in the National Economic and Social Development Plans, the study employs qualitative approaches, in particular in-depth interviews and focus groups, as the best means to obtain primary data from different stakeholders in Thailand's contemporary performing arts world for analysis. Specifically, this study uses in-depth interviews to explore the views of governmental agencies, artists and private performing arts organisations, academics and experts,

media companies and corporate sponsors. For potential audiences, the focus group method will help to uncover viewers' attitudes towards contemporary performing arts participation. To achieve reliability, validity and generalisability in data collection, the researcher relied on multiple forms of 'evidence [to] really reflect the reality under examination' (Gummesson, 2000, p. 185), as well as a data-gathering process from all stakeholders in Thai contemporary performing arts sector. This started with carefully selected and conducted pilot tests, tailored especially for the focus groups. The testing process helped to clarify some errors that may occur during the discussions and to check validity in order to receive reliable and efficient information.

3.2.1 Document research (Desk research):

Desk research is a critical first step before starting field research. Travis argues that 'desk research is not about collecting data' (2021). Guimarães agrees and highlights, instead it 'explores data from existing documents and previous research, secondary data, to gather information over a particular topic' (2022). It is a process of cautious review selected data analysed by others to gain a broader understanding of a phenomena (Travis, 2021).

It helps the researcher know what has been done before, as a background to doing and discovering something new (ibid.). This study used secondary research methods to explore and review academic documents, official records, and public domain reports related to Thai arts and culture (NTG Skills Alliance, 2019), investigating and analysing historical documents, Thai policy documents, government strategies and action plans. Data from this document research help explain the economic and social phenomena in each period of the country's plans, which the researcher will utilise alongside qualitative interpretations of data.

Thailand's Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council has published National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDPs) every five years since 1961 to provide a holistic framework for the country's development. This means that, since 1961, the cultural policies developed and used by the Ministry of Culture have been tailored to meet the goals of current NESDPs.¹⁷ To understand arts and culture policy in Thailand, it is necessary to investigate the NESDPs since the former needs to fit within the priorities and structures of the latter. Furthermore, in 2018, the Strategic Transformation Office (STO) under the military government launched the new 20-year National Strategy as the first long term strategic plan which became the top priorities of the country's policy that all ministries need to follow. Therefore, the main documents examined in this study are as listed below.

¹⁷ The current Ministry of Culture in Thailand was established in 2002. In 1938, a Division of Culture was set up under the Department of Fine Arts and in 1952 it became the Ministry of Culture with the Department of Fine Arts as a subordinate agency. In 1958 it was renamed the Division of Culture under the Ministry of Education before its 2002 reestablishment under its current title, with the responsibility of overseeing Thailand's culture, religion and arts.

1. Twelve National Economic Development Plans, i.e., 1961-1966; 1967-1971; 1972-1976; 1977-1981; 1982-1986; 1987-1991; 1992-1996; 1997-2001; 2002-2006; 2007-2011; 2012-2016; 2017-2021 (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020).

2. 20-year National Strategy; 2018-2037, Royal Gazette Announcement version (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2018).

3. Policies and Strategies to Foster Contemporary Arts and Culture; 2017-2021 (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2017a)

4. Action Plan to Foster Contemporary Arts and Culture; 2020-2022 (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2020)

5. Budgets of the Ministry of Culture during 2020-2022 (Budget Bureau, 2022)

3.2.2 Data collection method: In-depth interview

In-depth interviews with 15 representatives of key actors from pivotal stakeholders in arts and culture in Thailand included those from governmental organisations, private arts organisation and artists, funding agencies, corporate sponsors, and performing arts experts. They were carried out to provide viewpoints and perspectives as primary sources of information for analysis.

In the government sector, the selection criteria for each interviewee were based on their having a working position with a high level of management, enabling them to provide richer and deeper information in terms of policy and organisational practices. For those in key private performing arts organisations, this study selected those who represent a diverse range of organisations, both commercial and non-mainstream performing arts companies or venues. Furthermore, some active performing arts networks and festivals that have been running for more than 5 years were also selected. The last stakeholder group came from media companies, theatre critics and funding agencies who have played an important role in the Thai contemporary performing arts sector for more than 5 years.

Thus, the 15 qualified targets from the 3 categories of stakeholders were invited by the researcher to voluntarily participate in this interview as qualified participants with knowledge of the contemporary performing arts sector in Thailand. In-depth interviews were conducted between November 2022 and January 2023. The participants from the three groups are as follows:

- 4 key representatives from the governmental sector
- 7 key representatives from the non-mainstream performing arts sector
- 4 representatives from theatre promotion agencies, theatre critics, and funding agencies

No in-depth interviewee's name is included in this thesis in order to protect their anonymity in-line with research ethics concerns. During the data management process, in-depth interviewees were randomly coded as IDI-01, IDI-02, IDI-03,..., IDI-14 and IDI-15. These codes are used to reference quotes or results from each in-depth interviewees in Chapters 5.

3.2.3 Data collection method: Focus group

As explained in the research design sections above, the choice of focus groups is useful to deeply explore some of the hidden or implicit issues affecting participants or audiences (Bexter, 2009). To provide a baseline understanding of how audiences think and feel about artistic appreciation and participation in performing arts activities, regardless of their understanding or appreciation of traditional or contemporary arts and their values, the focus groups were designed to collect data from 60 participants.

The sampling process is a procedure by which a researcher tries to choose participants who are most appropriate for the study and who can provide the best response to achieve the research goal, namely, to find a 'representative sample – a group that is similar to a larger population' (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009, p. 26). Sampling strategies normally come in two main types, i.e., probabilistic sampling and non-probabilistic sampling (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998). The sample selection of the probabilistic sampling technique is based purely on chance, or 'random sample'; namely, anyone can be chosen as a sample. For non-probabilistic sampling techniques or non-random samples, researchers gather samples from individuals from the whole population, who do not have an equal chance of being chosen as an attender of the research (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009; Kupolokun 2014). Random sampling can be divided into two ways: convenience sampling (choosing those who are available for study) and snowball sampling or purposive sampling (choosing those who are initially sampled for the study and based on who the researcher considers would be suitable for the study). The former sampling approach usually proposes people who live nearby the research site or researcher's friends. It is advantageous with regard to recruiting practicality but due to not being representative of the ordinary population has its disadvantages as a non-random sampling techniques (*ibid.*). The latter sampling approach, purposive sampling, allows researchers to focus on people with particular characteristics of interest to the project and concerns sampling subjects who can offer in-depth information in study meaning, process, interpretation and theory (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005). The choice of purposive selection criteria can include circumstances, experiences,

demographic characteristics, attitudes or any types of phenomena (Ritchie *et al.*, 2014). Of the two approaches, the non-random sampling approach best suits this research and the purposive sampling technique will be utilised, but not just conveniently random.

With regard to the focus group approaches, due to the unstable situation of COVID-19 in Thailand, group interviews were conducted online via Zoom meetings. Target recruitments were also conducted via email or Facebook Messenger. The main participant categories consisted of two groups: an **audience group** for those who have seen contemporary performing arts before and a **non-audience group** for those who have never seen such an event. The non-audience group also includes those who attended a performance event once but did not like it or who never thought to attend that type of performance again. Perhaps due to COVID-19, some had never seen a live performance on stage, but had watched a recording of it or a live broadcast on public TV on some special national occasion, such as a musical to pay homage to the king on his birthday celebration. They are not genuine theatregoers but become an audience by chance rather than by interest. This type of target is also classified in terms of the group of non-audience members.

To recruit the audience group from participants who have had an experience of watching contemporary performing arts, the researcher contacted theatre venues in Thailand via email to help with the random selection of possible participants from their audiences in each age group (from their audience database) and to check for permission with their audiences for their willingness to freely participate in this research. Only audiences who allow the venues to give their emails to the researcher were approached. Once approached targets agreed to participate, the researcher kept them on the possible participant list for this category.

Participants in the non-audience group were recruited through chain sampling. They were randomly selected from recommendations of participated audiences' friends or relatives as these audiences know well about their friends or relatives who are non-audience of contemporary performing arts. After getting permission to approach target informants, the researcher approached them and kept them on the possible participant list. Then, the possible participants for each category were randomly contacted by the researcher.

In addition, the criteria of the sampling selection were based on three age groups: A) 18-29 years old, B) 30-39 years old, and C) 40 years old and above (see Table 2). Recently advances in communication technology and the digital media environments have become part of everyday life. Technological progress and social situations have always influenced those who share the same experiences, interests, and worldviews. Therefore, these three groups are firstly divided based on basic social media usage ability and digital platform literacy, as the focus group interviews conducted on Zoom as online conferences. The last group included those aged 40 years old and above because

those above 50 tend to have difficulty joining the focus group using the Zoom app. However, in practice some participants in this group C have received some technical help from their sons or daughters. Secondly, the selections for these age groups were also based on recent theatre goers and theatre makers survey data between 2020-2022 by the Thai Theatre Foundation, as the majority of active respondents were aged between 18 and 50 years old with an overall age average of Thai contemporary theatre goers at 28 years old (Thai Theatre Foundation, 2022).

For each age range, this study conducted interviews with four groups of targets with or without an experience of watching contemporary arts. Participants consisted of those from the Bangkok metropolitan area (including 5 surrounding provinces, i.e., Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Prakan, Samut Sakhon) and other regions. The total number of each focus group was 5 participants. Although the gender of participants was supposed to be random, the researcher carefully arranged and balanced the mixture of targets' genders into three types: male, female, and non-binary.

Focus group interviews were conducted between December 2022 and February 2023. For research ethical reasons, all focus group interviewees' information is anonymised in this thesis. During the data management process, focus group interviewees were coded by age range (A, B, C), theatre watching experience (E-experienced, N-No experience) and residential areas (B-Bangkok Metropolitan area, O-Other regions) and a number 1-5. In other words, Group AEB has 5 interviewees who are identified as AEB-1, AEB-2, AEB-3, AEB-4 and AEB-5. These codes are used for reference purposes when quoting from each focus group interviewee in Chapter 5.

Table 2: Focus group details of target selection criteria

Age range	Group code	Experience of watching Contemporary performing arts (Yes=E, No=N)	Total 60 targets	Breakdown of targets by residential areas in each focus group	
				Bangkok metropolitan area (B)	Other regions (O)
18 – 29 years old (A)	AEB	YES	5	5	-
	AEO	YES	5	-	5
	ANB	NO	5	5	-
	ANO	NO	5	-	5
30 – 39 years old (B)	BEB	YES	5	5	-
	BEO	YES	5	-	5
	BNB	NO	5	5	-
	BNO	NO	5	-	5
40 years old and above (C)	CEB	YES	5	5	-
	CEO	YES	5	-	5
	CNB	NO	5	5	-
	CNO	NO	5	-	5

3.3 Research Limitations

Sample sizes in qualitative research are frequently lower than for quantitative research since accumulating more data does not always lead to knowing more. This is because all that is required for a piece of data or a piece of code to be included in the analysis framework is that there to be one instance of it. As Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) point out, the methods used here, such as in-depth interview and focus group, also have significant drawbacks, namely limited sample sizes and non-randomness. It is possible that the results produced here will not apply to the larger population from which the sample is taken. Additionally, because samples are frequently not drawn fully at random, participants might not be representative of the general population. This study carefully explores the purposeful sampling strategy, particularly with regard to audience data gathering in a suitable sample size in qualitative research that can reflect most of the population as much as feasible and be able to maintain quality of data when considering some limitations of this approach.

Additionally, participant hierarchies, such as those of dominant people, might affect focus group outcomes. Focus groups are mostly used to hear what audiences are saying about topics that are important to them. Therefore, it is crucial to create groups whose members are likely to have common interests and feel at ease sharing their opinions in front of other group members. Less confident individuals may feel restricted when groups contain people with extreme variation in degrees of authority or status. When supervisors and subordinates are placed in the same group, this problem can become acute. Additionally, conversation might be hampered if groups of participants are incompatible with one another in critical respects related to the topics under discussion (Health and Safety Executive, 2022). The researcher was careful in all processes of planning and recruiting participants for the focus groups to avoid any hierarchy domination among participants that might occur.

As this study collected all the data in Thai and then summarised, translated, interpreted and reported in English, any missing information or different ways of expression may occur in this process. Although most words in most languages have stylistic or lexical equivalents, some words cannot be translated precisely, and some expressions produced by translation do not always match. The translator must therefore go above and beyond the scope of the translator's responsibilities by adapting and interpreting the material. In addition, the translation may be less effective due to cultural, social or political differences (European Language Industry Association, 2017). However, in this study, the researcher is both the translator and interpreter, and accordingly this issue was handled with extra care in preparation, which was then double-checked for translation accuracy by a veteran Thai-English translator. Furthermore, to ensure that all the discussions are delivered appropriately in English, they are rechecked by a native English reader in the final proofreading.

3.4 Data analysis

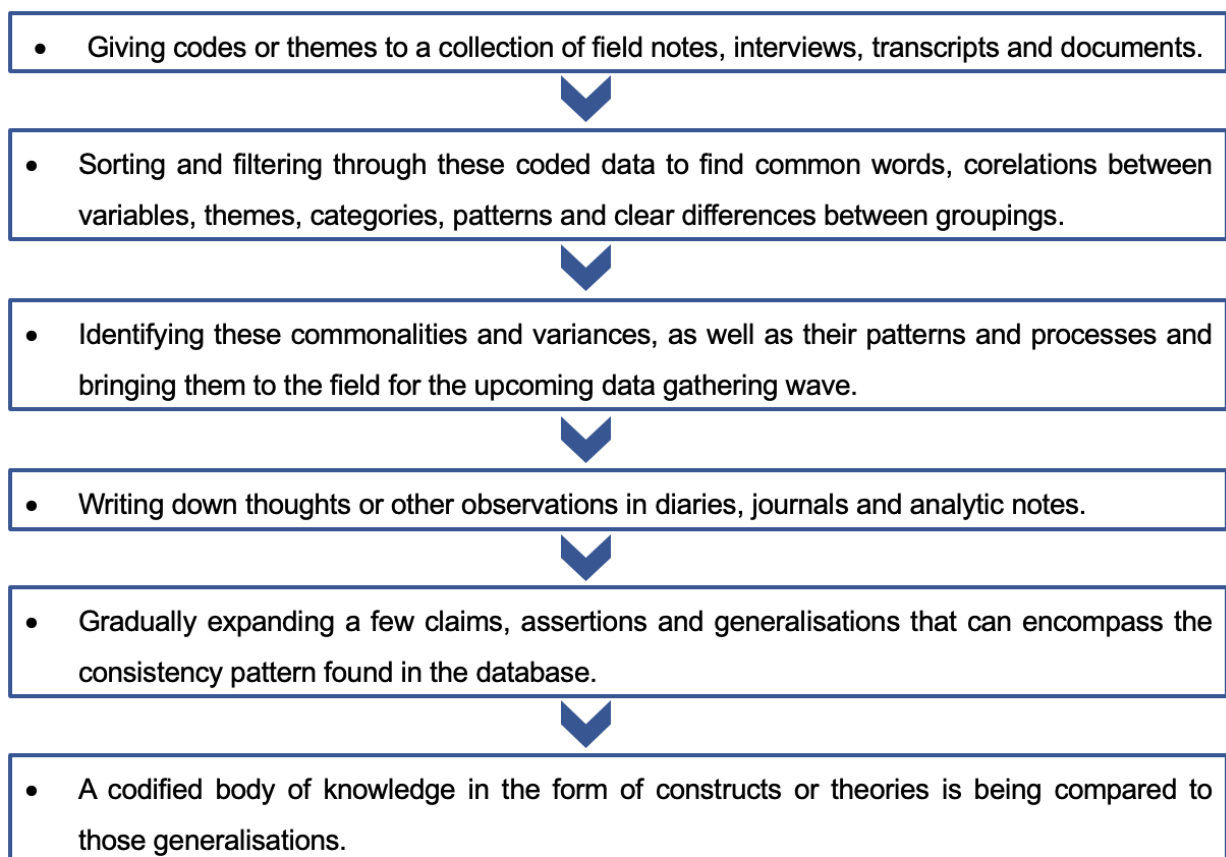
Qualitative data analysis involves classifying and interpreting linguistic (or visual) data to draw conclusions about the implicit and explicit dimensions and patterns of meaning-making in the data and what is represented in it, while including social or subjective meanings that may be referred to as meaning-making. Additionally, qualitative data analysis is used to identify and characterise problems in the field or the structures and procedures in practices and routines. Qualitative data analysis often uses techniques for a deep analysis (elaboration of categories, hermeneutic interpretations or recognised structures) in combination with approaches to examine the material (overviews, condensation, summaries). The goal of comparing multiple materials, text, or examples is usually to arrive at generalisable statements (Flick, 2009).

Three methodologies can be utilised in qualitative data analysis, and qualitative research in general, to analyse social phenomena. Firstly, the focus is on subjective experiences, so to get at data for this, researchers often use interviews or written sources, including diaries of target interviewees. A second strategy focuses on defining how a social situation is created, using information from participant observation or recording of family interactions or involving target participants. The third strategy is to explore implicit and even unconscious facets of a social phenomenon together with the first two strategies. Again, data for this come from observing participants' reactions. The interpretation of occurrences, interactions and discourses takes centre stage in this situation (ibid.). Among these three approaches, only the first will be used to get at subjective experiences.

As Ochieng *et al.* (2018) suggest, analysis can be difficult as focus group discussions typically produce both qualitative and observational data. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, 2008) see grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Strauss, 1987), content analysis (Morgan, 1988), and discourse analysis as useful to analysing focus group data (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The researcher may also acquire qualitative and quantitative information through a 'three-element coding scheme', leading to mixed content analysis, which Morgan suggests using to analyse data from a focus group discussion (1988). The 'three coding-framework' refers to a first step of the ethnographic analysis, which produces qualitative results, and two processes of the content analysis, which produces quantitative results. The process of data coding involves two steps. The first step is initial coding, which creates many category codes without imposing a cap on the total number of codes (Charmaz, 2006). Doing this allows the researcher to identify terms used frequently by respondents as signs of significant themes, and to create relationship graphs and summarise new ideas. Focused coding is the second stage, where the researcher removes, merges or divides the coding categories found in the previous stage to help highlight bigger themes and recurring ideas that link the codes. When comparing focus groups, group dynamics, individual participants, and the statements of the participants, this procedure might produce quantitative data

(Carey & Smith, 1994; Morgan 1995 in Ochieng *et al.*, 2018). By classifying data into groups, content analysis allows for the systematic coding of data and the discovery of patterns that would otherwise go undetected by only listening to voice recordings or reading the transcripts. Meanwhile, ethnographic analysis is completely qualitative and relies heavily on direct quotes from group conversations. As a result, the procedure is not systematic and depends on the researcher's capacity to categorise the data into themes, discourses or illustrative quotations, while upholding objectivity and taking the focus group's setting into account. But ethnographic research can provide a thorough interpretive description of regular social interactions, discussions and actions taking place within the focus group, which can be helpful in some circumstances (Ochieng *et al.*, 2018).

Qualitative research analysis also requires making comprehensive descriptions and explanations that still incorporate the gaps, contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in personal and social existence. The risk comes in attempting to apply logic, order and plausibility of theory-making to social life, which is often uneven, incomplete and unpredictable. This leads to using a standard set of analytical techniques in sequence.



(Miles *et al.*, 2014).

3.5 Practical constraints

The unstable COVID-19 situation in Thailand dramatically affected the planning of this research. After two years of this unpredictable pandemic, the Ministry of Public Health, Thailand downgraded COVID-19 from a hazardous communicable illness to a non-hazardous infectious disease. It decided to revoke the state of emergency decree from 1st October 2022. Since then, no proof of vaccination or COVID-19 test result was needed for travellers visiting Thailand (Royal Thai Government, 2022). However, until early 2023, wearing face masks in public places was common and even social distancing was not unusual for Thai people, particularly when they were indoors or enclosed spaces. Many Thais also avoided making physical contact with each other. To prepare the research method in early 2020 before the pandemic, data collection in person with informants at real sites in Thailand was planned, but travelling abroad during this crisis was challenging and risky to the health and safety of the researcher and possible informants. Furthermore, even if the researcher decided to do data collection onsite, most people in Thailand in 2022 to early 2023 were concerned about social distancing and sharing public spaces. This unstable situation generated difficulties for data collection in Thailand. Moreover, digital platforms of data collection were also a crucial component that frames the process of data collection in this study. It affected selecting participants who have basic computer literacy to effectively participate in the research. Secondly, business confidentiality was a key concern for the researcher as well. Following research ethics guidelines, some information from theatre companies might need to be treated with confidentiality and limit the depth of data collected. Finally, lack of payment to informants/participants (commonly done in Thailand) could be an obstacle to recruiting potential targets, especially for focus groups that need to make time to join the group. However, this voluntary approach helped provide information from participants who were willing to contribute to the study.

3.6 Research Ethics

Any study involving human subjects or personally identifiable information has ethical ramifications. A crucial component of excellent research practice is taking those consequences into account and addressing any problems that may arise. Along with a project's level of scientific rigour and the conduct of the researchers, research ethics is an important component of research integrity. It specifically relates to protecting any research subjects. The researcher is dedicated to ensuring that every study project is carried out with careful consideration. This study follows the framework for research ethics from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), UK, as a practice for social science research. ESRC's suggested six principles of ethical research (2021) are in Figure 8 below.

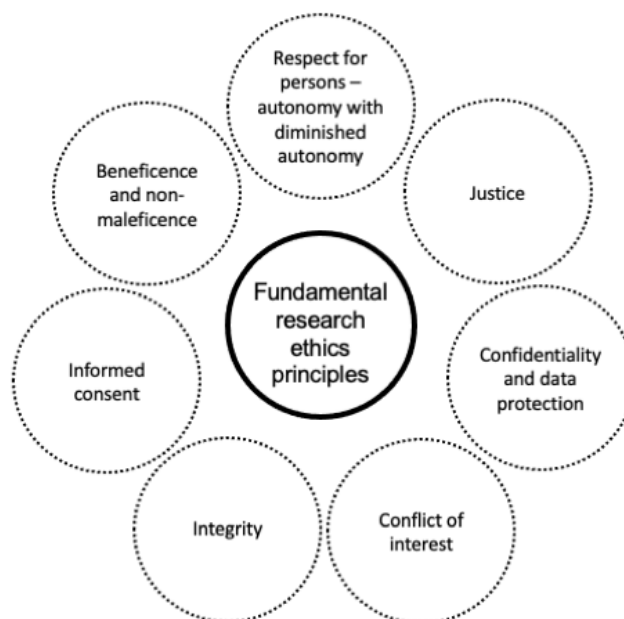
Figure 8: The framework for research ethics

1. Research should aim to maximise benefit for individuals and society and minimise risk and harm.
2. The rights and dignity of individuals and groups should be respected.
3. Wherever possible, participation should be voluntary and appropriately informed.
4. Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency.
5. Lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined.
6. Independence of research should be maintained and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided, they should be made explicit.

Economic and Social Research Council: ESRC (2021)

The researcher took data protection, confidentiality and anonymity into account even if the research is assessed to be low risk. In addition, this research respects the fundamental research ethics principles below (See Figure 9).

Figure 9: Fundamental research ethics principles
(© City, University of London, 2022)



All research participants had to give their consent voluntarily, without being subjected to pressure or undue influence; and their rights, dignity and autonomy must be respected and adequately safeguarded. An independent individual can deliberate about personal goals and take action in accordance with such consideration. Giving weight to autonomous people's carefully researched ideas and decisions while abstaining from impeding their actions unless they blatantly hurt other people is what it means to respect autonomy.

In terms of beneficence and non-maleficence, the value of the research outweighed any risks and negative effects. The researcher worked to minimise potential risks to participants and themselves while maximising the research's potential benefits. Strong safety measures were taken to reduce any potential risks and injury. An evaluation of the probability of positive benefits as well as possible dangers was necessary for a favourable risk/benefit analysis.

Equal treatment is a fundamental tenet of justice in research. Comparative studies between various societal individuals or groups were encouraged. The researchers carefully examined the broader societal impact of their research when participants were chosen and when advantages and disadvantages of its results were assessed.

To give informed consent, research personnel and participants (1) must get proper information regarding the study, (2) in an understandable manner (3) without undue pressure or improper enticement. The notification contained information on the research protocol, the goals, potential risks and benefits, alternate techniques and a statement giving participants the option to ask questions and to withdraw from the study at any time. To be understood, information was presented in a way that makes sense in the context and setting in which it was received. Wherever needed the research tailored the information's presentation to the capacities of the participants. The researcher made sure that each participant understood the material. Each decision by a participant was made voluntarily and without coercion or other improper influence.

The researcher observed confidentiality and data protection and followed all participants' requests on confidentiality of information and personal data, as well as their individual and group preferences for anonymity. Participants were offered a variety of alternatives for the consent they might give to the use of their data, ranging from complete anonymity to the usage of quotes with or without acknowledgement on the other. All researcher-generated data is complying with applicable law and institutional policy and is securely stored in an acceptable manner.

Research was planned, reviewed and carried out to guarantee that established integrity requirements are met and that quality and transparency are ensured. Examples of undesirable practices are: falsifications caused by improper manipulation, selection or use of data, pictures or

consents; plagiarism is when someone uses another person's words, ideas or creative work (whether it be written or spoken) without giving them credit or getting their permission; fabrication through the generation of fraudulent data or other research-related elements (i.e., participant consent and paperwork); poor interpretation of the data, material interests, engagement or qualification, as well as incorrect handling of charges of misconduct by failing to address potential violations (attempts to cover up misbehaviour or retaliate against whistle-blowers): all are examples of misrepresenting data.

Finally, there was no conflict of interest or partiality in the research. Even when there is no real conflict of interest, extra effort was taken to avoid the appearance of any conflict of interest. Neither the researcher nor anyone else found any potential conflict of interest in this research (City, University of London, 2022).

In this research, to follow research ethics principles above, all procedures for data collection were carefully conducted by the researcher as in Figure 10 and 11 below.

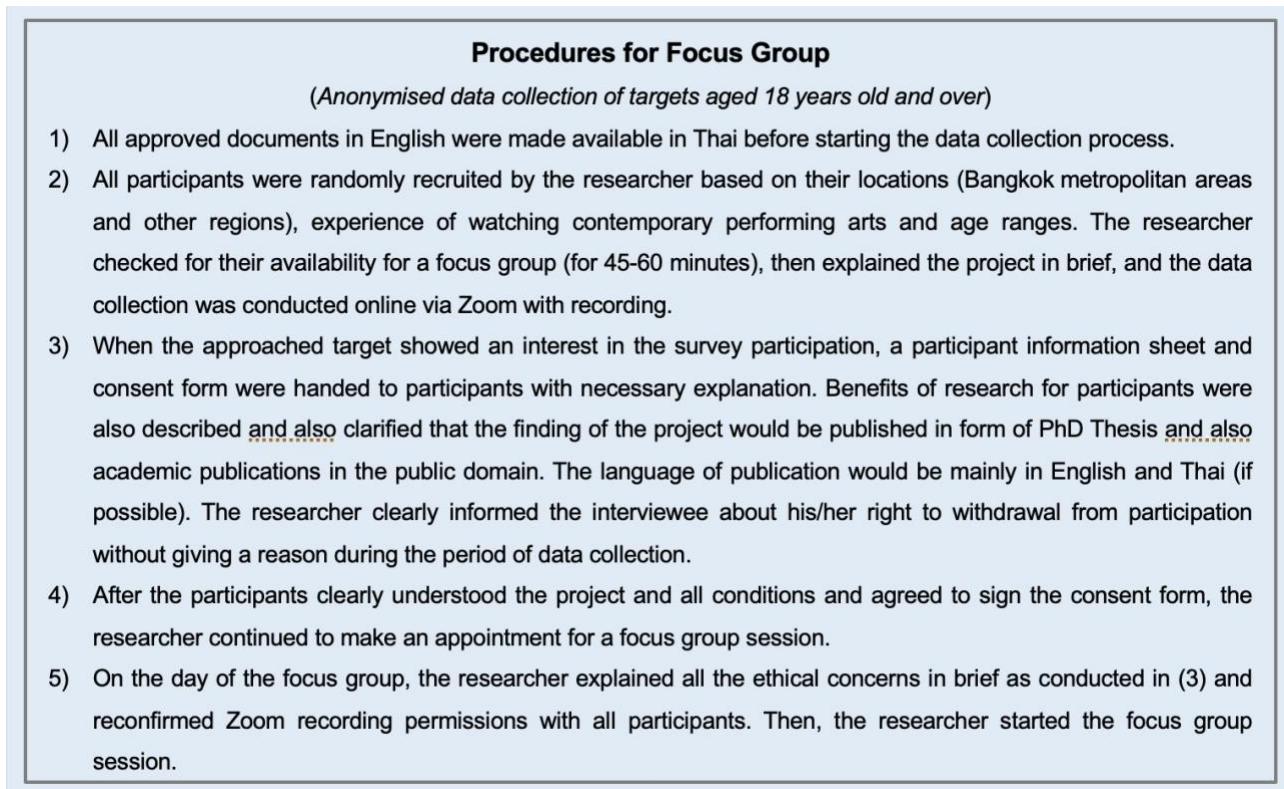
Figure 10: Procedures for an In-Depth Interview

Procedures for an In-Depth Interview

(Anonymised data collection of targets aged 18 years old and over)

- 1) All approved documents in English were also available in Thai before starting the data collection process.
- 2) Qualified professional interviewees from the government sector, private arts sector and academics or experts were approached via email or telephone by the researcher for their voluntary participation in this research project. Interviewees were informed briefly about this project from the first contact.
- 3) The researcher checked the availability of each interviewee, whether he/she allows for audio-recording and make an appointment for an official interview at their own workplace or by Zoom (online) with video recording.
- 4) On the day of the interview, the researcher first explained the project in detail. A participant information sheet and consent form were handed to each participant with necessary explanation. The benefits of research for each participant were also described, as well as the use of the project's findings for the PhD thesis, along with academic publications in the public domain. The language of publication would be mainly in English and Thai (if possible). The researcher clearly informed the interviewee about his/her right to withdraw from participation without giving a reason in the period of data collection.
- 5) After the participants have clearly understood the project and approved of all conditions and agreed to sign the consent form, the researcher continued with the in-depth interview.

Figure 11: Procedures for Focus Group



For reasons of confidentiality, participants details were anonymised. No information that could identify a participant individually would be released to anyone outside the study. The whole study was collected into anonymised datasets, in which no individual could be identified. All record files and transcripts were stored safely in a secure locked cabinet. The research data were always kept in locked files. All digital recording files were stored in a secure server and on the researcher's laptop with a safeguarded password so that only the researcher has access to the files. Any printed documents containing data were filed by the researcher and kept in his locked cabinet at home and only he has possession of the key to access these documents. Upon completion, all the data obtained in the study will be destroyed. The researcher will, however, use the information collected in the PhD thesis, other publications and academic conference presentations. The researcher may also use any information that he obtained from this study in any way he thinks is best for publication or education. These datasets may be retained indefinitely in central data repositories [Goldsmiths Research Online, UK Data Archive, Thailand Data Archive, for instance] for the benefit of future research. Furthermore, the data collected during the study might be used for additional or subsequent research.

Regarding data protection privacy, this research follows the 'General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Goldsmiths Research: guidelines for participants'. Under GDPR, participants have the following rights over their personal data as below.

Figure 12: Participant right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

- *The right to be informed if personal data is being used.*
- *The right to get copies of data.*
- *The right to get data corrected.*
- *The right to get data deleted.*
- *The right to limit how researcher use data*
- *The right to data portability.*
- *The right to object to the use of data.*
- *The right to know how data is processed using automated decision making and profiling.*
- *The right to access information from a public body.*
- *The right to raise a concern.*

(Information Commissioner's Office: ICO, 2022)

Chapter 4: Findings from Desk (Document) Research

This chapter discusses the historical context of the performing arts creation in Thailand with particular reference to the role of the Thai state and the officially recognised religion of Buddhism. In order to understand the constraints in developing contemporary Thai performing arts and its audiences, it is crucial to understand these historical and cultural linkages that connect Thai arts, especially the performing arts, to the Thai cultural sphere. This chapter will revisit the past with the discussions of Siam/Tai/Thai and its origin and examine the traditional notion of three foci structuring in Thai social and cultural life, namely the Wat (Temple), the Wang (palace) and the Ban (Home/Village). What is interesting is that this threefold division of focus points is also encountered in neighbouring traditional societies in Southeast Asia, indicative of a predominantly rural orientation that continues to exert an influence into the present context despite extensive urbanisation since the early to mid-20th century (Hitchcock, 1996). The roles of each in supporting arts in Thai society will be illustrated as each institution interrelates and influences one another under absolute monarchy. Next, Siam's status as an independent Southeast Asian nation that has never been colonised by westerners will be examined with regard to the use of Siamese art as a form of soft power actively adopted by the monarchy as one of the means to assimilate European arts and culture, following on from what is widely regarded in Thailand as the golden age of arts and drama in the reign of King Rama VI (r. 1910-1925). The chapter will then examine how, after the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, arts were used as a political instrument, followed by a revival of national traditional performing arts and a political shift to economic development in 1961. The re-establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 2002 to the present is discussed as starting point of recognising contemporary arts and culture in Thailand. The last two sections concern the country's current policies and their impact on contemporary performing arts, from 60-year of the National Economic and Social Development Plans to the long-term 20-year National Strategy of 2018.

4.1 Siam / Tai / Thai and its origins

Official histories of the country that is now called Thailand often base themselves on a common set of traditional records. For example, Silpawattanatham, a renowned journal on Thai arts and culture, relies on records of Simon De La Loubère (1642-1729) and Jit Phumisak (1930-1966) for the names for Thailand. La Loubère, a diplomat of the French king Louis XIV who visited Siam in 1687-1688 during the reign of King Narai in the Ayutthaya¹⁸ era, linked the names *Siam* and *Tai* for the country of the time in his book, *the Kingdom of Siam* (1691). Contemporary Portuguese authors used the

¹⁸ Ayutthaya is the capital city of Siam between 1351-1767.

word *Siam* to refer to 'the nation of Siameses' even though those given that name called themselves *Tai*, meaning *Free*. Although the orthography in Portuguese make the terms *Siam* and *Siaom* seem similar, the French term shares the same root, which should be *Sions*, rather than *Siams*, or *Siones* in Latin. Because La Loubère notes that those from the contemporary state of Pegu¹⁹ (now in modern Myanmar) asserted that *Siam* means *Free*, he argues that the Portuguese may have derived *Siam* from them (1969).

Later, the young historian Jit Phumisak gives the words '*Siam*' and '*Tai*' or '*Thai*' a systematic linguistic analysis in his posthumously published text *Etymology of the Words Siam, Thai, Lao and Khom (Khmer): the social characteristics of ethnic names*. He suggests that the word *Siam* seems to have derived from *Sarm*, *Sam*, *Same*, *Siem*, *Sayam*, and *Seam* over a thousand years ago. *Siam* was the word once used by other ethnic groups for some people then living in what is now modern Thailand while those people calling themselves '*Thai*' not '*Siam*' because '*Thai*' had a positive meaning, namely 'free' (1981, p.612).

Historians also recognise modern Thai people as part of *Tai* ethnolinguistic groups which share common cultural and linguistic features. The *Tai* language group is a sub-branch of the *kra-dai* languages, formally known as Tai-Kadai (Pittayaporn, 2009; Dalby, 2004). It forms a family of tentatively '100 languages in Southeast Asia, extending from the island of Hainan, China, in the east to the Indian province of Assam in the west and south to the Malay Peninsula' (Jenks & Pittayaporn, 2014). Modern scholars often argue that *Tai*-speaking groups migrated from areas south of the Yangzi River around the 6th century B.C.E., before the Han²⁰ (Chinese) spread from northern parts of modern China into that area. During prehistoric times, people there had 'differentiated into a large number of separate but related identities' (Wyatt, 2003, p.1). In the first few centuries C.E., as Han armies became dominant in southern coastal areas of modern China, *Tai*-speaking groups moved inland to valleys away from the coast. Over the following centuries, *Tai*-speakers expanded further west, migrating into areas spanning from the Guangxi provincial interior to the Brahmaputra valley. *Tai* groups chose to move to river basins and their surrounding hills, finally moving into areas near the Mekong River basin further south, and from there into the low watersheds around the upper subsidiaries of the Chao Phraya River system (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2014). Wyatt argues that

¹⁹ Pegu (or Bago in Burmese, a port city in southern Myanmar) was the capital of Mon Kingdom now in modern Myanmar which existed in the 9th-11th and 11th-16th centuries, as well as for a brief period in the mid-18th century. Around 6th century C.E., Mon people lived in the Chao Phraya River basin after emigrating from western China. Two early Mon kingdoms called Dvaravati and Haripunjaya had relations with the ancient Kingdom of Funan in modern Cambodia and with China and were influenced by Khmer civilisation. After the Mon migrated west into the Irrawaddy River delta of what is now southern Myanmar in, they began practicing Theravāda Buddhism which had come from Ceylon and South India which became their state religion and led to their use of the Indian Pāli script. Mon groups were dominant in southeastern parts of modern Myanmar and established cities in Pegu and Thaton in 825 (Britannica, 2011).

²⁰ The Han is the largest ethnic group in modern China (outnumbering other ethnic groups or nationalities in all modern Chinese provinces except Tibet and Xinjiang) and have formed the homogeneous mass culture of the Chinese people, sharing similar traditions, cultural practices and written language (Britannica, 2021).

‘the people who brought the core elements of the contemporary Thai identity to what is now Thailand did not arrive in the central portion of the Indochina peninsular until about a thousand years ago; for them we had best reserved the word *Tai*, a term used to denote the various Tai people in general’ (Wyatt, 2003, p. 1). Tai language is the most distinguishing feature of Thais, and there is some level of mutual intelligibility among those speaking Siamese, Shan, Lao and other languages in the same Tai language family. There are many relationships among the languages in the Tai language family. All are tonal and monosyllabic, but the number of tones may vary from 4 to 9. All Tai languages or dialects consist largely of single syllable words and common grammatical structures. Although Thai people may descend from *Tai*-speakers who arrived to Thailand centuries ago, many now in Thailand may also descend from earlier groups like the Mon, Khmer, or from later Indian or Chinese emigrants. ‘Only over many centuries has a “Thai” culture, a civilization and identity, evolved as the product of interaction between Tai and indigenous and immigrant cultures’ (ibid., p.1).

Groups speaking Mon and Khmer languages, which belong to the Austroasiatic²¹ language family (Thomas, 1964), are considered to have been indigenous to the Chao Phraya basin. Only later did Tai language speakers who are now called ‘Thai’ became the major group in this area. Thai language also integrated some elements from the earlier groups in this area, so that ‘Thai has absorbed many basic words, grammatical rules, and syntactical principles from Khmer (and possibly from Mon too) that it is sharply different from any other language in the Thai family (one linguist dubbed in Khmero-Tai)’ (Baker and Phongpaichit, p. 4). In addition, Chinese and Indian groups also moved into what is now modern Thailand and the interactions of Thais with these immigrant cultures, particularly Indian cultures, is clear in the performing arts.

The anthropologist Suchit Wongthed discusses these foreign influences on Thai art and culture, arguing that ‘many ethnicities in Southeast Asia play a crucial role as a part of current Thai tradition, namely dance, singing, and the use of musical instruments, that evolved from ancient times’ (1999, pp. 12-13). Moreover, ‘evidence of this interaction can be seen by the comparison of the musical instruments used by the races’, according to Swangviboonpong (2003, p. 1). For example, The Thai soprano fiddle, *Saw Duang*, and the Chinese *erhu* fiddle share similar classification²² among musical instruments in a sub-group of spike fiddles; spike lutes played with a bow, in Chordophone classification. Besides, some instruments in membranophones category such as Thai *Taphon* drum

²¹ Austroasiatic is ‘a language family that has been postulated in Southeast Asia. The precise membership of this family is still a matter of some debate, with various linguists denying or affirming the membership of different groups of languages. But there is a fairly general agreement that such a family does exist, composed of Mon-Khmer, Palaungic, Munda, and some of the disputed groups’ (Thomas, 1964, p. 150).

²² In 1914 in Berlin, Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs developed a classification system to describe musical instruments and to compare them to other instruments from around the world. This system is still commonly used today (Hornbostel and Sachs, 1961).

and Indian *mridangam* drum have a similar appearance (ibid.). Archaeological evidence, such as Dvaravati terra cotta antique figures, have been found in many provinces of Thailand (i.e. Ratchaburi, Nakhon Sawan and Nakhon Ratchasima) showing the importance of this early culture in a wide area. Dance poses seen in these figures resemble those in the Indian *Bharata Natayasastra*'s dance poses of sculptured reliefs in the Temple of Siva Nataraj (Dancing God) at Gitumbhrum in Madras, leading Thai dance scholar Dhanit Yupho to argue that

The discovery of these sculptures is evidence of the long relationship in the *nattasin*, the art of dancing, between the people of India and those of the land, which is now Thailand, at least from the Dvaravati period [11th -16th centuries B.E.], or even before that, the Lopburi period [16th -17th B.E.] up to the present. Therefore, it may be possible that the native teachers themselves had learned the Indian *nattasin*, taught it to their people and had these sculptured reliefs made to depict the dance movement which were seen and performed at that time (1973, p. 3).

The Dvaravati kingdom (6th to the 11th century) referred to above was named the 'To-lo-po-ti' kingdom by a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim (Ling, 1979) in the mid-7th century and spanned an area from the east of Sri Ksetra (in modern Myanmar) to the west of Isanapura (in modern Cambodia), thus including parts of modern Thailand. These earliest Hindu and Buddhist sculptures appeared in the area during this period and 'the inscriptions of Phra Pathom and of Lopburi, in the archaic Mon language, prove that the population was basically Mon' (Coedès, 1975, p.76).

Evidence of Dvaravati sculptured reliefs in Thailand suggests that Thai dance and music thus may have absorbed influences from Mon as well as Khmer sources. Rutnin (2012) critically considers the possibility of international influences on Thai dance and music from historical evidence and examines three theories that may explain this. First, there is the evidence of sculptures and paintings of the highly developed dance culture of Orissa, India which may have entered the area via merchant ships from south India and northeast India. The trade routes extended from India to Java during the Srivijaya empire (7th-13th century), and to the Khmer empire (9th-15th centuries) based in what is now modern Cambodia. Both empires expanded throughout the Indochinese peninsula and their influences were absorbed into the kingdom of Sukhothai which was founded in the 13th century and approximately forms today the province of that name of now modern Thailand. The second theory refers to the arrival of Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka in the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng (1279-1300) via a route directly connecting the area south of India / Sri Lanka (Ceylon) to the southern part of what is now Thailand, with South Indians settling in the area of Nakhon Si Thammarat on the southern Thai peninsula. Arts, together with Buddhism, may also have been brought to Thailand or may have been introduced alongside earlier with Hindu forms of worship.

Some strong evidence for this view is the existence of the southern dance-drama *Nora Chatri*²³ that resembles some aspect of *Kandyan* dances in Sri Lanka. All its dance movements imitate birds, and gestures, costumes, while musical arrangements are dominated by drums with various quick rhythms. Thirdly, influence may have come directly from Java to southern parts of what is now Thailand in the same period when Hindu-Javanese civilization was introduced to Khmers. Srivijaya style sculptures found in the south of Thailand suggest this, especially the renowned image of the 'Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva' in Chaiya. The s-curve of the left upper body clearly shows a contrapposto (tripanka) pose of a dancer with swaying hip to the right. Moreover, the etymology of *lakhon*, a common Thai word that means dance-drama, seems to have come from the Javanese word *lakhuan* or *lagon*. The similar Khmer words *lakkhon* and *lukkhum* may also suggest similar influence (Rutnin, 2012, pp. 22-23). None of these theories is uncontested by Thai scholars.

Thai culture gradually evolved from many small early-agricultural societies (or tribal societies) and, as suggested above, has been influenced by the diverse civilisations, knowledge systems and customs that evolved in the wider region as a whole. The tribal agricultural clusters later developed into urban societies which formed the basis of smaller kingdoms and larger empires across the region, with the rise and fall of each kingdom often overlapping in time and space. In the region, the Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Haripunjaya, Sukhothai, Lopburi (Lawo), Ayodhya-Supanabhum, Lanna, Krungsri Ayutthaya, and Rattanakosin are the best documented and discussed (Shinawatra, 2006).

Like in the discussion of the origin of Siam, Tai and Thai from diverse angles and as synthetic cultural products, historical evidence suggests that mixing or combining aspects or elements from different cultures is a distinctive feature of Siam, Tai, Thai cultures. The encounter of Tai speaking groups with various indigenous and immigrant cultures over a long period of time has helped to make a thriving Thai culture, both by adopting and by adapting other cultures into the Thai cultural composition.

4.2 A historical perspective on arts and culture in Thailand

The ancient Thai way of agricultural life is seen in the many rituals and ceremonies related to agricultural activities, such as rice growing, harvesting, and praying for rain. The King has played a significant role as 'Father rice Planter who distributes the best grain to his people and perform the rice planting ceremony' (Rutnin, 2012, p. XIII). These royal (and local) ceremonies use performances of dance and dance-drama to worship patron deities of agriculture and natural phenomena (ibid.).

²³ Historians believe that *Nora Chatri* is the oldest form of Thai dance-drama. Its similarity to Indian and Ceylonese dances affirms the theory that *Nora Chatri* originated in the southern part of Thailand near Nakhon Si Thammarat. Later in Ayutthaya kingdom (1350-1767) it was developed into *lakhon nok*, a more refined form of dance-drama (Rutnin, 2012, p. 23).

Rabum Tumna or rice planting dances to pay homage to the Rice Goddess (*mae phosop*) in Chainat Province (Ministry of Culture, 2021) is an example of a local practice to encourage social solidarity and connection to nature much needed in agricultural communities. Beliefs and practices tied to the Rice Goddess can be seen in other areas of Southeast Asia. The veneration of the rice goddess, Dewi Sri, in Java and Bali, for example, is a practice based on Hindu deity traditions which entered Southeast Asia from India. According to Hamilton, 'It appears that India Lakshmi and Indonesia's Dewi Sri are one and the same... both of them are considered to be the consort of Vishnu; and Vishnu, the ideal head of state' (2003, p. 261). In addition, dance offerings to spirits have a long history in Thailand that endures into the present and can be seen at some temples and shrines in Bangkok nowadays as a way of creating merit. Dancers in Thai traditional costume and music groups perform based on a commission made by donors to request or repay something from the gods. The influence of religious belief is seen directly in ritual uses of the performing arts, but also in the temple itself, which is a key venue for performances meant to entertain audiences (Brandon, 1993).

In the distant past, *dontri* (music) and *nattasilp* (dance) were a part of a phenomenon known as *kan lalen* (playing) rather than as a performance. It was not just entertainment as this 'playing' was put on for some specific occasion for both the *phu len* (players) and *phu ruam kan lalen* (participants or audience), such as for local agricultural prosperity ceremonies (Wongthed, 1999). Thai scholars and historians usually explain the *kan lalen* as efforts to connect two different social worlds -- Thai royal society and Thai village society. Each society had its own cultures and traditions, sometimes called 'imperial culture' and 'populace culture'.²⁴ Wallipodom clarifies the differences of these two clusters as follows: 'the royal culture is a high culture, while the populace culture is a low culture, which can be called life culture. The populace culture involves rural-urban ways of life... the royal culture creates unity and similarity in society to integrate different groups together, while the populace cultures maintain diversity for different groups in society' (2001, p.4, also cited in Shinawatra, 2006, p. 96). The existence of royal culture is far removed from common people. They can only experience its symbols or arts and cultural patterns in specially prepared events. Populace culture is part of a process by which each community adopts and improves its own way of life and its culture to survive in different areas of its settlement (ibid.).

Royal culture belongs to the royal family, aristocrats, and elites, while the populace culture belongs to ordinary people. Wongthed also indicates that 'the centre of the populace's culture is *wat* (temple) in the community or village. While the royal culture has *wang* (palace) or *nai muang* (inner city) as a centre' (1999, p. 6). Mattani Rutnin, a scholar in Thai drama and theatre, and Poonpit Amatyakul, a

²⁴ As opposed to 'imperial culture' (royal culture), 'populace culture' or 'life culture' in this research refers to the culture of ordinary people. Popular culture is just one aspect of 'populace culture' since not all 'populace' activities have popular demand.

royal scholar in Thai music, make a similar argument about how Thai society organises cultural life and the arts around three crucial centres, namely *ban* (home / village), *wat* (temple) and *wang* (palace) (Rutnin, 2012; Amatyakul 2008). Amatyakul illustrates this concept that *ban* is a home for musicians, *wat* (temple) is a stage for musician and *wang* (palace) is a source of patronage (2008). These three centres suggest a system of interdependent parts that have affected the development of the arts. The role of *wat* has been recognised for its social, educational and religious aspects, and *wang* has represented the political role of the monarchy, while *ban* has been a symbol of citizens or ordinary people in society (Rutnin, 2012).

Studies on the relationships between arts and culture in Thailand often explain the relations between royal culture and populace culture in a positive and harmonious terms (Wongthed, 1999; Amatyakul, 2008; Rutnin, 2012). This reflects some compromises of attitude, possibly to avoid any criticism to the system.

4.2.1 Wat: how Buddhism gives way to the Thai way of life

The *wat* (Theravadan Buddhist temple/monastery) is a common religious place/organisation seen throughout Thai society. Most Thais and the Thai state bureaus claim to be Buddhist. They practice Theravada Buddhism, known as *Lankawong* or *Lankavamsa*²⁵ doctrine in Thai, and the King must be Buddhist. A famous inscription of King Ram Khamhaeng in 1291 claims that Buddhism was introduced to Sukhothai from Nakhon Si Thammarat (Rutnin, 2012). A Buddhist *wat* is the centre of the community. Recent records say there are 42,879 temples in Thailand (National Office of Buddhism, Thailand, 2021). Theravada, Doctrine of the Elders, also sometimes called in Pali Hinayana meaning 'lesser vehicle' Buddhism, focuses on self-salvation (Ishii, 1986, p. xiii). Today, Buddhist beliefs, mixed with indigenous ancestor worship and Brahmanism²⁶-Hindunism, 'is held by 95 percent of the population. Dance and dramatic performances may first have evolved in conjunction with religious practice at the village level, and rural performances continue to be a regular part of religious festivals' (Brandon, 1993, p. 234).

Buddhism is deeply embedded in the Thai way of life but in practice, it integrates forebear worship (ancestor worship) and ritual components from other religions, i.e., Hindu/ Brahmanism and ancestor worship (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2014). As Akin Rabibhadana points out about the mixture of other beliefs in Thai Buddhism, 'When Buddhism arrived in Thailand, it probably had already been mixed with Hinduism. Although Brahmanical elements tended to centre around the royal courts, their

²⁵ A sect of Theravada Buddhism that has been evolved in Sri Lanka where it is thought to have spread to Thailand.

²⁶ Brahmanism is often used in Thailand to define a kind of early period of Hinduism. Normally it is referred to as Hindu/Brahmanism or Brahmanistic Hinduism.

influence was shown in a large number of Buddhist rituals as practised by the common Thai people... There has been a tendency for Buddhism to incorporate other indigenous and Brahmanical practices' (1969, p. 11). The indigenous beliefs like the belief in spirits and ancestor worship have been practiced as part of Buddhism without any conflict as part of a blend of many parts that constitute Thai Buddhism (ibid.).

The practical focus of Theravada Buddhism, following one's own path to achieve self-liberation, is tied to the concept that 'a certain kind of action generates a certain kind of consequence. The man who sows a certain kind of seed will reap them' (Rabibhadana, 1969, p. 11). Good actions bring *bun* (merit) or *khwaam di* (virtue) while bad actions generate *baab*, demerit (ibid., Tambiah, 1977). The concept of *bun* and *baab* is related to belief in reincarnation. *Kam* (Karma), which is related to the effects of *bun* and *baab*, leads to rebirth. From the Buddhist point of view, life is full of suffering and finding a way to reach *nipphan* (nirvana), not being born again, is the highest objective since this is the way to avoid suffering. This concept can be seen in the life stories of the historical Buddha Gautama Siddhartha, and his previous lives, whose accumulation of many merits is described in Jatakas.

The notion of *bun* and *baab* is a general belief of most Thai people. There are three main modes of making merit in Buddhism: *than* (alms giving), *sil* (following precepts or rules of conduct and good behaviour), and *phawana* (meditation or focusing the mind on the Buddha and his teaching). Alms or donations can be offered to the monks, ordinary people, or even animals. Offering food to monks may be done when they pass by homes in areas around a *wat* in the early morning, or by donating money or food to temples, hospitals, social foundations or to anyone in need, feeding fish in the river near temples are some common ways to donate. For *sil* or precepts, normally laypersons are expected to follow five rules of behaviour: not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery or engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not taking any intoxicants like alcohol or harmful substances. Finally, *phawana* is an act of worship by concentrating the mind on Buddha and his teaching through meditation, listening to sermons and practising some religious service (Rabibhadana, 1969).

The function of the *wat* as the centre of Thai religious organisation is seen in its role as the residence of the monks and the place of Buddhist worship. Thai people's lives normally are closely connected to the *wat*, in the past 'religious and social gathering as well as most artistic and educational activities were to be found nowhere except in the precincts of the *wat*. The Thai *rite de passage* of life from birth to death has been inseparable from the *wat*' (Anuman Rajadhon, 1986, p. 27). Nowadays, the *wat* is also a centre where the people in the community can meet or exchange information and hold various social events. A regular significant event was the 'Temple Fair' which included local performing arts to entertain local audiences. In early periods, the temple was also a centre for visual

art as paintings and sculptures, such as Buddha images, mural paintings, and pieces of stucco on the temple's wall, which were produced to serve the faith in religion. People traditionally viewed these visual works as sources of sacred power unlike the art today seen in museums or art exhibitions (Kunavichayanont, 2002).

Many Buddhist ceremonies or activities helped draw people to the temple, but contemporary Thailand is more complex and Buddhists and non-Buddhists may enjoy activities at the temple fairs or visit the temple for reasons other than being Buddhist or practicing Buddhism. For religious art, people were audiences in the sense of Hill's *et al.* 'arts receptor', even by accident. This role has limited marketing value however because it does not account for the art receptor's intent. It might be more useful when an audience is targeted via public art. People who see public art, like a sculpture in the city, may or may not be looking for it. Even if a person has no intention of viewing it, they may still be considered an audience since the work is just an expression of the artist present in the audience's lives (2003). 'They stumble across artistic experiences which exist or take place in their lives, by default making them passive members of an audience despite the absence of any intention on their part' (Hill *et al.*, 2018, p. 28).

4.2.2 Wang: the centre of the arts in absolute monarchy

It was a theatre state in which the kings and princes were the impresarios, the priests the directors, and the peasants the supporting cast, stage crew, and audience... Court ceremonialism was the driving force of court politics; and mass ritual was not a device to shore up the state, but rather the state, even in its final gasp, was a device for the enactment of mass ritual. Power served pomp, not pomp power (Geertz, 1980, p.13).

Clifford Geertz argues in his famous book, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth Century Bali*, that royal ritual ceremonies dramatise and perform the charismatic power and divinity of the king as a part of political organisation in Bali. The notion of 'theatre state' may be useful in showing the polity of Thailand under absolute monarchy before the political revolution in 1932, but Jan Wisseman Christie has criticised Geertz's idea that the theatre state lacked any serious political power:

The divinity of the negara's ruler...gave him no more than symbolic ownership of the land and populace; control of irrigation, and thus of agriculture, does not appear to have been either the organizing principle of this state or the basis of political power within it... This statecraft-as-a-thespian-art thesis rejects economic struggle as the central dynamic of history in the region, as it rejects the myth of the closed, autarchic, communal village (1986, p. 69).

For Thailand, however, Geertz's Hindu concept of political interrelation conveys a situation that has persisted in Thai society until the present. The royal barge procession is an example of a large royal ceremony with a religious and a political purpose taking place since the Ayutthaya period centuries

ago (Prachachat, 2019). This ceremony can be seen today on special royal occasions, showing how the theatre state concept still exists in contemporary Thailand. From the period of the Ayutthaya Kingdom (1351-1767) to the establishment of Bangkok (1782) at the start of the Rattanakosin era, the role of the Thai Monarch was recognised as a semi-divine figure associated with the Hindu God Vishnu. This view of the divine kinship was key to pre-colonial Indic polities of Southeast Asia, deriving from the Hindu notion of monarch as a living embodiment of a deity.

In the view of many Thai people, a king and the royal family possesses two distinct qualities unlike ordinary people: *barami* (charismatic power) and *bun* (merit). The Thai notion of kingship combines the Hindu concept of *devaraja* (God King) with the Buddhist notion of being a *thammaraja* (King of law) who upholds the *dharma* for the polity. Furthermore, the Thai king, as a virtuous being, governs as a 'student of the *dharma*' under the concept of *thammasat* or Dhammasatha in Pali (Rabibhadana, 1969).

Thai theatre is seen to emphasise this monarchy-centred view in official mainstream Thai history. Most narratives or publications on traditional theatre focus on honouring past kings and the contribution they made to not just the theatre but also to the country (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). Kukrit Pramoj also argues that the role of performing arts especially in Ayutthaya period was to serve the king's *barami* (1996). Dance-drama of the Ayutthaya kingdom served a political function for the monarchy and was related to Buddhism and Brahmanistic Hinduism. *Chak nak duekdamban*²⁷ in the Indraphisek ceremony, for example, was a ritual dance in which military officers and royal pages dress as characters in the *Ramakien*²⁸. Rutnin explains that this performance '...pulled the great *ananta nakharat*, in a tug-of-war between the gods and demons (*yak*) to decide who would get the sacred water of immortality. The Ayutthayans possibly adopted this ceremony from the Khmer, since there are sculptures depicting this scene at Ankor Wat' (2012, p. 54). The record of *chak nak duekdamban* was found in 1496 chronicle of King Ramathibodi II. This kind of performing arts shows the relationship of Hindu culture and the royal religious cult,

...particularly the cult of Vishnu-Rama, the righteous king in the *Ramakien*. The thosaphit rachatham²⁹ (ten kingly virtues) upheld by Rama represented a model for the Ayutthaya kings. The Jataka tales in *lakhon nok* also emphasise these kingly

²⁷ Historians (Rutnin, 2012; Yupho, 1973) argue that *chak nak duekdamban* is the origin of the Thai *khon* (mask dance-drama). *Khon* dancers dress and wear masks to take on roles as gods, demons, and monkeys.

²⁸ *Ramakien* is a Thai version of the Ramayana epic (Rama story) originated in India and spread throughout South India and Southeast Asia. India, Cambodia, Indonesia and other places have their own versions. In Thailand, the story was known from the late 13th century as seen in how the ruler of the Thai Sukhothai kingdom was named King Ramkhamhaeng with *Ram* deriving from the word Rama. Rama is the name of the Hindu God and is an avatar of God Vishnu. This *Ramakien* epic has played an important role in religion, polity, and culture of Thai kingdoms as seen in the name of the Thai capital 'Ayutthaya' which borrowed from the name of a city in the Ramayana epic, 'Ayodhya' (birthplace of Rama), while the current Chakri dynasty (Rattanakosin era) also uses the name Rama as a title for all its kings.

²⁹ Ten rules apply to Siamese kings, namely, 1) charity, 2) morality, 3) self-sacrifice, 4) honesty, 5) kindness (gentleness), 6) austerity, 7) non-anger, 8) non-violence, 9) tolerance (patience) and 10) righteousness (Thai-language.com, 2024).

virtues of heroes, who are Bothisattvas. The romance of *Inao* in *lakhon nai* portrays the hero as a great lover and fighter, who suffers the consequences of his misbehaviour, spoiled character, arrogance, pride and bad judgement. After a long period of trial and suffering, he finally attains happiness together with his true love, Busba (ibid., pp.54-55).

Thai societal organisation is historically based on the *sakdina* system. *Sakdina* means 'status that is defined by land' so the proportion of land one owned, was the main marker of one's class and status in the social system. Thai *sakdina* depends directly on the King and its status is changeable. 'The King, or *chao phaendin* (the lord of the land), was perceived as infallible, semidivine, and all-powerful. He was the only landowner' (Malikhao, 2017, p. 51). *Sakdina* was a system to socially classify people (Kasetsiri, 2005) and was divided into 'two classes: **administrators** or elites including the king, royalty and noblemen or officials; and the **rest**, that is commoners and slaves, the lowest class in society... Only the priesthood did not belong to either class' (Incherdchai, 1993, p. 221). The status accorded by *sakdina* normally depends on one's responsibilities to the state and one's contributions to the rest of society. It constituted an individual's right, prosperity, and political power. The King can distribute his rights by giving land in return to those who had served the King or who had an individual relationship to blood in accordance with the status of *sakdina*.

This social system played an important role in the Ayutthaya kingdom situated in the middle of Chao Phraya River basin between 1350 and 1767. The history of the kingdom is often divided into two parts, one lasting from its establishment in 1351 and lasting to 1569, when it lost to the Burmese troops of Bayin Naung, and a second for the period from the recovery of independence in 1583 until 1767, when the Burmese sacked the city. Rabibhadana highlights the major characteristics of the Ayutthaya kingdom:

...The main problem of establishing a viable kingdom in this area was the control of manpower. The area was underpopulated, and the movement of the people was extremely difficult to control. Further, the area was subjected to almost continuous warfare. In each war the victor always carried off large numbers of people from the conquered territory to his own land. These factors provided conditions suitable for the growth of strong monarchical power and an organization which was tailored for rapid mobilization of manpower. The Kingdom of Ayutthaya had both of these. Political organization must naturally be compatible with the indigenous social organization. (1969, p. 19).

The societal composition in this area consisted of many small groups, and each group had a leader who helped control his members under a supreme ruler (Sukpanich, 1962). These leaders were called *nai* or *munnai* in Thai while commoners or ordinary people, known as *phrai* or *lek*, were required to register with their leaders. This registration served as a manpower mobilisation process during war time, as seen in the law of 1351: 'When the royal order is given to mobilise men for war, and the *munnai* do not bring their men to battle but take money from their *phrai* instead...one of the

eight types of punishment will be given to such *munnai*' (Rabibhadana, 1969, p. 20). *Phrai* had to register with leaders to receive their protection in law and property, as Rabibhadana states that 'his property had no protection from theft for there was no authority which he could seek to right his wrong. When found out, he would be punished and made to serve *corvée*, i.e., work for free without being paid. No kind of assistance from the state could be had except through the intermediary offices of the *nai*' (1969, p. 20).

The performing arts of the *Ban* (*home, village*) for ordinary people and *Wang* (*palace*) for the king and royal family differed. *Wang* had some kinds of dramas preserved only for the king, like *lakhon nai* (inner court plays) and *khon luang* (royal masked dance-drama). Dance-drama is typical for many theatrical traditions in Southeast Asia and implies a story / drama conveyed with movement, e.g., *wajang wong* and *wajang topeng* (masked dance-drama) of Bali (De Zoete & Spies, 2002), *mak yong* (female dance-drama) of Malaysia, *zat pwe* (traditional dance-drama on Jataka or legendary themes) of Burma, *lakon kabach boran* (female dance-drama) and *lakon khol* (masked dance-drama) of Cambodia (Brandon, 1993). The palace had its own types of court performances for royal audiences or invited aristocrats, their families or sometimes diplomats. Nonetheless, *khon*, *lakhon nai* and other court performances are generally considered as a type of 'high art' that represents a royal heritage (Yupho, 1983; Virulrak, 2000 cited in Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). These royal court theatres have also been promoted, admired and defined as the classical form of traditional Thai theatre in recent decades, so some critical scholars define these classical genres as elite Thai theatre forms.

For *Ban*, village or ordinary people, there were variety of local forms of folk drama, such as *lakhon nok* (outer court play), folk and local dance and performance forms, which have mostly been positioned as 'low art' (Yupho, 1983; Virulrak, 2000 cited in Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). These performances have been managed as commercial troupes, and historical evidence suggests a record of commercial performing arts troupe since the Ayutthaya period as couples 'hire and invite professional dancers' (La Loubère, 1969, p.51) to perform in their wedding. 'During the late Ayutthaya period, however, dances were not as popular as performances with stories such as *nang*³⁰, *khon*, and *lakhon*' (Witayasakpan, 1992, p.40). This kind of commercial traditional performing arts troupe has developed over time as a popular traditional theatre troupe for ordinary people outside the royal court. However, commercial traditional theatre did not emerge to challenge royal court aesthetics until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was due to the rise of the middle class from commerce development, western education and bureaucracy and the release

³⁰ *Nang* was normally supported by the royal court and performed by royal court performers for royal celebrations or ceremonial events. Commercial *nang* troupes of regular people were not documented until the early Rattanakosin period.

of performing artists from the court. Theatre has progressively evolved from royal court entertainment into a commodity (ibid.).

Throughout these changes and even before, the monarchy has had a strong influence on the development, enrichment and patronisation of the arts, particularly dramatic literature and production, dating as far back as the fourteenth century. The concept of patronage is like many European countries' in 17th-18th centuries as O'Brien highlights, 'In European countries, the state gradually took over the role of patron from the monarchs and wealthy noblemen who had sponsored, protected and subsidised theatrical companies in the major cities. Well into the eighteenth century, the princes and monarchs of nation states licensed theatres' (2017, p.25). All the palaces of the royal family in old Siam normally owned a dance-drama troupe and a traditional music ensemble, and their purpose was embodied and project those palaces' prosperity and power. This kind of interrelation of support can be seen in traditional Thai music competitions that noteworthy in any royal ceremony or celebration held by the royal court. The *pipat*³¹ ensemble competition was an opportunity for ordinary skilful musicians to present their ability to public audiences and royal families who would have the ability to support them in the future, as Phansue indicates:

Meanwhile, each house would find famous skilled musicians to teach the band in its own house. Anyway, talented Thai musicians were plentiful in Bangkok and in other provinces as well. So there was a good chance for unknown musicians but very skilful to perform their abilities. The stage for competition was not hard to find as they happened in various places. The competitions at that time, had a lot of audiences who generally included the royal family and the public (2014, p. 75).

From the above synthesis of records on Thai traditional theatre studies, the relationship of court arts and popular traditional arts are seen to be interrelated and dependent on each other (Wongthed, 1999; Amatyakul, 2008; Rutnin, 2012). Despite their interdependence, they are often placed in a hierarchical relationship with court-related genres being seen as more refined or having a higher status, while popular or folk theatre traditions of commoners are typically regarded as being less refined and assigned a lower status. This kind of hierarchical view of the arts can be seen from the state's viewpoint nowadays as Jungwiwattanaporn argues:

Even though all Thai constitutions state that the power of the government belongs to 'all the people' who equally share dignity, rights, and liberties regardless of genders and ethnicities, 'low art' is rarely if ever represented as culturally equal. This hierarchical classification can be observed in the explicit choices of 'cultural representation' (e.g. as in performances, advertisements) made by the state during

³¹ The Thai *pipat* ensemble is a traditional music ensemble that has been developed since the Sukhothai period. It is 'an ensemble of mixed percussion instruments and woodwind instruments. It comprises the pi (oboe), the *ranat ek* (high-pitched xylophone), *ranat thum* (low-pitched xylophone), *khong wong yai* (large gong circle), *khong wong lek* (small gong circle), *taphon* (two-faced drum), *klong that* (barrel-shaped drums), and the *ching* (small hand-cymbals). The *Pipat* ensemble is usually played in Buddhist ceremonies and some important Thai rituals such as Wai Khru, a ceremony to pay homage to a classical arts teacher (Poprasit, 2014).

any official national or international events where the royal court traditions take the top rank and the top priority over the other genres. This attitude can also be observed by the mass media's choice of cultural representations during important national celebrations or tourism campaigns (2010, p. 70).

4.2.3 The foreign influence on Thai art and the Western domination period

The influence of foreign styles on Thai art has been visible since the Ayutthaya period (1350-1767) with the arrival of traders, diplomats, and adventurers from Asian (i.e. China, Japan, Persia) and European countries such as Portugal, Holland, Britain and France, often trading and religious activities, as well foreign ideas of art and culture. The mixture of traditional styles from Sukhothai (inherited from Khmer) and these other foreign art styles in the 17th and 18th centuries are shown in fusion styles of art and architecture in this period. King Narai (r. 1656-1688) attempted to broaden his foreign knowledge through diplomatic exchanges with France, the Netherlands and Persia (Iran). Architectural styles from Europe, China and Persia were incorporated by his royal court, with some examples of Gothic flamboyant arch windows of the Narai Ratchaniwet Palace in Lopburi province and the arch windows of Phra Buddha Kosajarn residence at Wat Putthai Sawan in Ayutthaya province (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2014). This fusion of foreign styles of art and architecture was also popular in the following Thonburi and Rattanakosin eras, but foreign influences in the Rattanakosin can be seen in the reign of King Rama II as much craftwork and paintings of the Portuguese king were found as decorative objects in his palace. In King Rama III's reign, trade boomed with China, and Chinese merchants brought many types of Chinese porcelain and stone sculptures to Thailand. The influence of Chinese art on religious architecture in this period is also clearly seen at Wat Raj Orasa, the royal temple of King Rama III, which he chose to build in a Chinese style. The Phra Prang Wat Arun, a stupa style pagoda at the temple of dawn, was covered completely with pieces of Chinese porcelain.

The 19th century saw the development of the armoured gunboat, the machine gun and the rocket in the industrialising nations of the West which, alongside a wide range of technical advances, were made possible by the accumulation of wealth for investment, a process described by Max Weber (1930) in 'The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism' (first published in German in 1905) which remain widely discussed and criticised. It is not possible here to discuss the merits Weber's and subsequent works, but only to note the link between industrialisation and colonialism in many, but not all, western nations. These advancements in western military technology were coupled with a growing belief in western racial superiority, based on a body of pseudo-scientific theories of racial difference called Social Darwinism. As Farish A. Noor argues

Unable to defend themselves against such weapons of mass destruction, the communities of Southeast Asia were defeated and in due course lost whatever control they had over their lands and seas, paving the way for the compartmentalising logic

and praxis of colonial multiculturalism – which was never intended to bring diverse communities together, but rather keep them apart and to slot them neatly into prescribed economic roles within the framework of the colonial plural economy (2021, p. 12).

This was a dangerous period for Siam, which saw that some European countries, namely Britain and France, invade other territories nearby, although the colonial incursion has been described as a jostle for power between London and Bangkok over the Malay Peninsula (Marks, 1996).

Maintaining an independent Siam challenged the Siamese kings, King Mongkut and his son Chulalongkorn, and everything in this difficult time depended on their decisions (Wyatt, 2003). King Mongkut (Rama IV) ascended the throne at the age of forty-seven (in 1851) after 27 years of being a Buddhist monk in a new monastic order, the Thammayutika sect, which he had established to reform and purify Buddhism as the national religion of Siam. His reign coincided with an expanding western imperialism, including invasions of neighbouring states in Burma, the Malay peninsula, and Indochina. Britain and France contested one another over these invasions. King Mongkut hired ex-officers of the British Army to train him personally in modern military science and technology, and to reorganise the Siamese army. He introduced western education by hiring an English teacher, Anna Leonowens (1831-1915), to educate the princes and princesses in the royal court to help prepare his children to be future leaders of Siam by understanding the ways of the west (Rutnin, 2012). In the two books she wrote about her work experiences in the Thai royal court, '*The English Governess at the Siamese Court*' and '*The Romance of the Harem*.' She is often critical of matters sensitive to Thais related to the King (Poshyananda, 2015). In addition, she also fictionalised some historical facts, making her work and views controversial among Thai historians. Her books inspired an American writer, Margaret Landon, to conduct more research in Thailand before publishing her famed historical novel 'Anna and the King of Siam' in 1944. This novel became a bestseller at the time, being translated into more than 20 languages, including Thai, leading to a 1951 Broadway musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein, followed by a 1956 film version of it, both called 'The King and I'. This film was banned by the Thai government as its contents seemed fictionalised and critical of the monarchy, to whom most of the Thai people pay high respect. This issue resulted in many reactions among Thai people. While most agreed with the government's decision, Dhammayos points out more critical views on Anna's works in his book "พระเจ้ากรุงสยาม" [Rex Siamen Suim] which was also banned: 'Our society don't want disagreeable voices or voices from different perspectives but only need voices from books to pay homage and flatter. The Thai book industry is disgusted and hopeless' (2004, p. 147). This discourse reflects the main attitude of Thai society and their loyalty to the monarchy.

Noor's view as a historian of how Southeast Asian was perceived and portrayed by western travellers and scholars to reach readers in the west demonstrates how the colonial encounter was rarely founded on a genuine meeting between equals. 'The framing of the Southeast Asian -- as pirate, as head-hunter, as unscientific agrarian peasant, etc. was part and parcel of the enterprise of racialised colonial-capitalism where the colonised Other was not only colonised in body/land but also in the process of labelling-naming' (2021, p. 11). The Siamese monarchy was deeply concerned about a foreign invasion and put much effort into protecting Siam from European domination. The court aimed to have Siam be recognised by potential invaders as a 'modernising nation' and not a barbaric or primitive land. As Poshyananda argues:

Manipulation and mimicry were applied so that the colonial perspective on Siam was that of a modernizing nation. King Mongkut (Rama IV, who reigned from 1851 to 1868) brilliantly adapted to modernity by posing in front of the camera in royal regalia, complete with jacket and Scots bonnet. Series of royal photographs were sent as gifts to Queen Victoria and the Emperor Napoleon III. In those day, posing for the camera was very much a taboo. The flash and the noise of the shutter were seen as foreboding signs: some interpreted them as the soul being sucked into the strange apparatus, while other feared that, in the wrong hands, portrait photographs could be used for black magic. But King Mongkut paid no heed to such superstition, embracing the advances being made in science, astrology, history and language (2015, p. 19).

The Bowring Treaty of 1855 between the British Empire and the Kingdom of Siam is a key event which not only opened Siam to western trade but also to capitalist development (Ingram 1971; Suthy, 1980). 'The period of the mid-1800s is a convenient point to begin the discussion of the emergence of modern Thailand (or Siam, as the kingdom was then known)' (Hewison, 1999, p. 98).

In the arts, King Rama IV was the first to know about western orchestral and chamber music (Visiting Arts, 2002). The era also saw a revival of Thai classical and the creation of new hybrid arts. Five new theatre forms emerged in his reign, namely *lakhon sepha* (story-telling dance drama), *lakhon chatri* (developed from *nora* of the south with unique music and dance style of *nora*), *lakhon chatri khong luang* (similar to *lakhon chatri* but performed by royal court female dancers), *lakhon na jo* (this type was assumed as a kind of dance drama performed in front of shadow play screen) and *lakhon phanthang* (Thai hybrid style of theatre integrated diverse cultures from various communities in Bangkok, e.g., Mon, Chinese, Malay etc.) (Virulrak, 1999, pp. 73-74). King Rama IV aimed to present 'the refined and highly cultivated arts of the royal court, as both political and social means to convince any Western aggressors of the rich heritage of the Siamese people, the stability and glory of the Siamese monarchy and its political and social superiority of Siam over other neighbouring countries in the peninsula' (Rutnin, 2012, pp. 92-93).

The relations between Thai and European royal courts were revived in the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) and King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). These relations helped extend diplomatic and royal

exchanges, with many royal portrait paintings, photographs and sculptures of European kings and their royal families sent to the Thai royal court as evidence of diplomatic links to establish foreign relations. These received tributes from European monarchs can be seen as an enthusiasm for acceptance and appreciation of western art in the royal household (Poshyananda, 1994).

4.2.4 From Siamese art as a soft power of monarchy to the assimilation of European art and culture

Under the guidance of King Rama V (1868-1910), Siam was the only country in Southeast Asia to avoid full colonisation and it became the first Asian state outside of Japan to develop a modern infrastructure, western dress, and social institutions. Many changes in Thai societal structure, economics, arts and culture occurred in this time, such as the elimination of *prai* (commoner) and *that* (slave), which eventually liberated labourers and slaves from royal control³² (Virulrak, 1999). The improvement and development of the nation along western lines was promoted by a farsighted and progressive king who did not use public funds to establish monasteries as his forefathers did, but instead invested in public welfare, building hospitals schools, roads and railways, and installing electricity and water-supply systems (Bhirasri, 1969). The Siamese court sought to creatively and flexibly assimilate the etiquette, attire and mannerisms of the west as vehicles to present Siam as a 'civilised' country as part of a political performance project to avoid colonisation. As Matthew Cohen argues, King Chulalongkorn used the idea of 'art and cultural diplomacy' so that 'in Asian cultural history, we can recognize many instances of arts and cultural diplomacy long before terms for it existed' (2019, p. 254). Like the 17th century Ryukyu Kingdom (located in Okinawa prefecture, Japan) which was under Japanese control in 1609, it achieved an independence through court entertainment with arts and music as diplomatic activities rather than swordsmanship (Suzuki, 2016, p.150). In the case of Siam, the concept of 'art and cultural diplomacy' was part of King Mongkut's repertoire, when he commanded the revival of Thai classical dance-drama in the royal court to entertain foreign royal visitors. His son, King Chulalongkorn, also utilised Siamese arts and culture as a form of soft power to protect Siamese land, as Poshyananda highlights:

Wisely, he (King Rama V) disseminated the notion of Siamese culture as a soft power, and his royal portraits appeared in *The Illustrated London News* and *Le Petit Journal*. Very efficiently, this modern Siamese sovereign returned the gaze of European onlookers, thanks to the European invention of photography and printed media... In 1885, under royal command, nineteen Siamese musicians travelled to London to participate in the *International Inventions Exhibition* at the Royal Albert Hall... The Siamese spectacles in London achieved its intended aim of encapsulating the quintessence of Siamese culture for British audience...The Siamese musicians had

³² On the effect of this *prai* and *tat* abolition on the theatre, Virulrak states that 'While the traditional performances of the early period were still functioning in the court and at public ceremonies, *lakhon puying kong luang* was seldom performed. The noble theatre declined since it had lost its *prai* and *tat* who used to be the free labourers of the theatre. King Rama V and his noblemen searched for new types of theatre that would suit the new mood of their new society' (1999, p.74).

the honour of performing for Queen Victoria at Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight, and for the Prince of Wales in London. Queen Victoria warmly appreciated the performance of *God Save the Queen* played by the Siamese ensemble (2015, p.20).

The King Rama V did not only export Thai music to the world, but also showed his appreciation of western styles of music by holding regular orchestral and chamber music performances at the royal court³³. This inspired many leading Thai classical musicians to experiment with western musical forms (Visiting Arts, 2002). In his period, six types of theatre were invented both from royal court and from public arenas. Firstly, *lakhon talok* (spoken comedy), a popular form which perhaps was created from clown scenes as normally seen in outer court theatre. Secondly, *lakhon phut* (spoken play) was first performed by the king's younger brothers for the new year parties in early period of his reign. It was probably derived from the king's English classes when he was young and may got this idea from the English play to welcome him when he visited Singapore (Virulrak, 1999, p. 74). A decade later, when his son Crown Prince Vajiravudh, the future Rama VI, returned to Thailand after finishing his study in England, he produced western style *lakhon phut* and a new form called *lakhon phut salab lam* (spoken drama interspersed with songs) after realising that texts were often better sung rather than spoken due to the familiarity of Thai audiences with this mode of presentation in conventional Thai theatre. Then *lakhon dukdamban* (singing dance drama) was created by mixing *lakhon nai* (inner court theatre) with *lakhon nok baeb luang* (royal style of outer court theatre) known to King Rama II. All parts of scripts that narrated actions and characters' emotions were cut as actions and dancers' emotions could be seen on stage. Fifth, *likay* is a popular theatre based on performers' improvisation in singing, dancing and delivering dialogues that is marked by ornate and glittering costumes, comic actions and fast-moving storyline are attractiveness (ibid). *Likay* target audiences were not like '*lakhon dukdamban* created to higher class of people, [but an art that] entertained the lower class' (Virulruk, 1999, p. 75). Lastly, *lakhon rong* (singing drama) which was created from *lakhon phanthang* inspired by *bangsawan* (Malay opera) performances in Bangkok before *lakhon rong* emerged. Besides these six new forms, three other kinds of theatre appeared in Bangkok in this period: *hun krabok* (rod puppet theatre), *nang talung* (small leather shadow puppet from the south) and *lam tat* (an indigenous repartee performance). Moreover, the Crown Prince Maha Vajiravudh also initiated a revival of *khon* (masked dance drama) traditions by training his royal pages in the art (ibid., pp. 74-75).

During this time, film cameras were first introduced to Siam. In 1905, the first permanent cinema called 'Japanese Cinema' was set up in Bangkok by a Japanese entrepreneur, followed by the establishment of Bangkok Rupphayon cinema company, or Prince Prida cinemas in 1907 to bring in foreign films to screen in its own 3-4 Bangkok cinemas (Sukwong and Suwannapak, 2001).

³³ Another example like this elsewhere in Southeast Asia is Walter Spies, the British artist who worked as *Kapellmeister* (bandmaster) in the *kraton* (palace) to the sultan of Yogyakarta (Hitchcock & Norris, 1995).

Appreciating western styles of art was a fashionable trend for the elite at that time, despite their political misgivings about the west. This western fascination is visible in other Southeast Asian countries at the time, particularly in Indonesia, which Matthew Cohen highlights in his book *Inventing the Performing Arts: Modernity and tradition in colonial Indonesia* (2016), noting how 'European culture wielded disproportionate influence, and not only among educated elites. During the course of the nineteenth century, Javanese and Chinese arts, developing in interaction with the consumption of European arts, underwent significant modifications in the ways they were staged and appreciated...The performing arts also offered a meeting ground and a site for exchange and for conflict as well, flying in the face of the Manichean compartmentalization of colonialism' (pp. 9-10).

The first royal visit to Europe by King Chulalongkorn in 1897 received much media attention and appeared in local newspapers like the *Illustrated London News* on 24 July 1897, *Le Petit Journal* on 19 September 1897 (Poshyananda, 1994), and *Le Patriote Illustré* in Brussels on 19 September 1897 (Boussard, *et al.*, 2008). The trip sought to encourage better understanding and strengthen relations between Siam and the heads of state of these powers and also to resist colonialism. The trip brought back many innovative and progressive ideas in European countries to Siam, but none were blindly followed. Rama V watchfully chose appropriate aspects that could be applied to the customs and traditions of his people (Poshyananda, 1994).

Wyatt argues that after his return from a European visit, King Chulalongkorn discovered it was impossible to bring European progressive ideas directly to Siam. Siamese officials were not ready for quick change. The new system needed a stronger foundation and skilled training for royal officials. A better educational system was a major concern in royal policy to develop Siam's government by producing competent personnel to work in the public and private sectors. The King set up a school in the palace in 1871 and other schools, such as the Army Cadet School, the Cartographic School, the School for Princes, the School for Dhamma Studies (Chulalongkorn University, 2021). A number of schools for ordinary people were also opened in Bangkok and in high areas of population. Then, in 1887, the Department of Education was established to develop the country's education and religious affairs (Visiting Arts, 2002). In 1892, the Department became a ministry and since then a primary school network was set up throughout the country (Ministry of Education, 2019). In 1899, a project to set up the Civil Service Training School was launched, and in 1902 its name was changed to the Royal Pages School (Chulalongkorn University, 2021). The educational development and establishment of an administrative system under King Rama V's vision gave rise to a bureaucratic system.

King Chulalongkorn's appreciation of Italian art, after this first visit there in 1904, led to royal commissions of several European artists, architects, painters, and sculptors, such as Cesare Ferro,

Galileo Chini, Carlo Rigoli and Alfonso Tornarelli. The King admired western art, especially sculpture and portrait painting and this interest in Europe and its culture had grown long before his European visit. Many art objects imported from Europe by royal command were used to decorate royal buildings as seen in the Chakri Throne Hall in the Grand Palace, the Waropat Phiman Hall and Uthayan Phumisathian Mansion in the Bang Pa-In Palace (Poshyananda, 1994). The King built palaces with European architectural and decorative styles as a sign of national prestige. On his second visit to Europe in 1907, he commissioned several European artists, visiting their studios and residences and posting for them. Furthermore, the Ambara Villa, a European architectural villa in an art nouveau style of exterior and interior decoration, and the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, an Italian Renaissance and neoclassical style throne hall, were also constructed under his orders. Smith points out, 'to Europeanize his country became with Chulalongkorn one of the dominating passions of his life' (1947, p. 92).

This recruitment of foreign craftsmen to the Siam royal court can be seen as a keen acceptance of western art and culture. However, some academic researchers criticise that this admiration of the west presents a threat to Thai arts and culture. Krairiksh and Thongchua observe that

Unfortunately, the western-style projects required the service of western-trained specialists which no Thai then could qualify. Although there were many gifted Thai craftsmen in His Majesty's service, such as Mom Chao Pravitt Jumsai, and Somdet Chaofa Krom Phraya Narisaranuwattiwong (also known as Prince Naris), they had not been trained in western methods and technology, so that they were unequalled to the tasks. The king, therefore, had to rely on imported European artists and technicians to execute his grandiose schemes.

Since most of the Thai craftsmen were trained through long period of apprenticeship in the traditional style of art, they were totally left behind by the requirements of the age and the taste of the time. Deprived of their normal sources of patronage, the monasteries and the court, few artisans were able to find outlets for their crafts. It was not surprising, therefore, that the king himself remarked that 'the state of crafts in Muang Thai is so depressing' (1982, p. 61).

In his patronage of western arts, in order to modernise Siam, the King overlooked the state of Thai arts but seemed to ignore or at last failed to enhance Siam's traditional arts and craftsmen. The promotion of Thai arts to its glorious days falls to his successor, King Rama VI.

4.2.5 The golden age of art and drama

Historians consider the reign of King Rama VI, King Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1925), with his enthusiastic interest in European art and culture, the golden age of arts and drama (Virulrak, 1999; Rutnin, 2012). King Vajiravudh spent many years studying in England since he was 12 years old and promoted English art and culture by bringing back an intellectual elite lifestyle to the Thai royal court. Virulrak

states that ‘people in the upper class became more westernised in their lifestyles. Education was still a prime objective of the King’ (1999, p. 75). In 1917 Chulalongkorn University was established as the first higher education institution in the nation. To deal with the rise of Chinese, the World War I and the king’s efforts to change of the ruling system, theatre became a tool to foster nationalism and kingship, aided by the largescale royal scout division that he founded. While there, royal pages could learn the king’s ideology from his plays. Another special school for music, drama and craft training and other subjects was also set up. In the many palaces the king built in other provinces, each included a theatrical space for showing his plays. These palaces were used as a camp for his scouts (ibid., p. 76). King Rama VI translated and produced many western plays, e.g., Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, *As you like it*, *the Merchant of Venice*, and Sheridan’s *the Rival*. He also wrote original plays in both English and Thai. A distinctive work is his translation and adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Othello* to Thai traditional form of *lakhon nok* in 1911. He adapted all characters and contexts in Shakespeare’s original story to locations near Siam (Table 3).

*Table 3: Comparison of Shakespeare’s Othello and King Rama VI’s adaptation
(Puriwanchana, 2021)*

Shakespeare’s original version	King Rama VI’s adaptation to Thai traditional form of <i>lakhon nok</i>
Othello: the moor of Venice	Phaya Raj Wangsan (A name and title conferred by Siamese king for a Malay aristocrat who specialises in navigating)
Desdemona (a kind of flower)	Bua Phan (based on a flower name)
Venice city	Srivijaya (based on a historical empire, Indonesia)
Cyprus	Malacca (a seaside town in Malaysia)
Turkish fleet	Malay fleet
Desdemona’s handkerchief	Change handkerchief to Thai Sabai (breast cloth) of Bua Phan instead

King Rama VI wrote, translated and adapted more than 150 plays, including western style plays and Thai traditional theatre (Virulrak, 1999). Aside from western theatrical forms and techniques introduced in his reign, he also developed institutions and teaching methods for Thai classical dance drama. The Royal Academy of Literature was set up and the first Thai novels were written. In 1911, the king established the Fine Arts Department as a key institution to conserve Siamese arts and culture as a national heritage, including museums, libraries, monuments and antiquities and crafts (Fine Arts Department, 2020). In 1913, the Poh-Chang Academy of Arts opened to train people in

traditional painting, sculpture and architecture (Rutnin, 2012). Chulalongkorn University was founded in 1917 as an expansion and transformation of the Civil Service College, which started in his father's reign (Chulalongkorn University, 2021). In 1919, a public relations film unit was set up under the Royal Thai State Railways to produce documentaries, newsreels, and state publicity films. The Siam film company was involved nation-wide in cinema and film distributions (Sukwong and Suwannapak, 2001).

In addition, western music ensembles were established in numerous royal palaces under the royal patronage. Pioneering hybrid creations using western musical notation to compose traditional Thai music mixed the style of Thai *pipat* ensemble and western classical ensemble by HRH Prince Paribatra of Bang Khum Phrom Palace. There was an annual competition between Bang Khun Phrom Palace and Burapha Phirom Palace that challenged musicians' skills and sought improvement. It was also used to ascertain which palace had the best musicians and bands. In the late 1920s, a symphony orchestra was founded by Phra Chen Duriyanga, a court musician and composer (whose German father was an adviser on brass band music to the court of King Rama V), in the Royal Entertainment Department of the Royal Palace. Chen created many western classical styles of works such as several symphony suites, film scores, the first western-style Thai opera '*Darani*' and the Thai national anthem (Visiting Arts, 2002). This adoption of western art forms appeared was a fashionable practice in the royal palaces.

Rama VI noticed that developments seemed to stress modernisation while traditional art was devalued and left behind. He expressed his opinion on the current situation of national art in his article 'Siamese Art' in the Siam Observer, an English language newspaper, noting that 'Siamese Art has been sick for many years and very little efforts are being made to save the poor "Invalid" ... So, art that is dying cannot hope to flourish for long by the efforts of the few genuine art lovers; what it wants is general appreciation and public support, and this is exactly what Siamese Art is not getting' (Asvabahu, 1974).

This perceived weakening of traditional art since the beginning of western influences in the reign of King Rama IV and its acute decline under Rama V led Krairiksh and Thongchua to claim that 'the cause for the decline of traditional art was the policy of modernization and the adoption of western culture in order to save it from colonialism. Ironically, independence and freedom were preserved at the cost of traditional values' (1982, p. 61). Siam's monarchs during this era of modernisation appreciated European art, especially under King Chulalongkorn, and western styles of art were more appreciated by elites than Thai conventional arts. Winichakul argues about the paradoxical attitude of Siamese rulers and elites towards the west that 'While they were anxious, the Siamese elite were not hostile to westerners. Many generations of Thai elite since the middle of the century were very fond of the *farang* (Westerners), and their craving for things Western was well known' (2000, p. 532).

Even though monarchs in this period were interested in art, like King Rama VI (1910-1925), financial problems became urgent under his reign (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2014). Excessive expenditure by the royal household had led to a financial crisis as Wyatt points out that 'The Privy Purse and Ministry of the Palace were consuming nearly 10 percent of the annual budget' (2003, p. 220). The total royal budget in 1924-25 was 9 million baht while real expenditures were estimated and probably exceeded 12 million baht of the total state budget of 96.4 million baht (ibid.). This financial problem continued to the reign of King Rama VII, King Prajadhipok (1925-1935) as Rutnin highlights that 'the government also had the accumulated debts and national inflation to tend with. The country was entering a new era of modern economy with little knowledge and experience... His first courageous deed was to cut the budget of the royal household and the king personal allowance' (2012, p.215). Rutnin also argues that the king's extravagant spending on royal entertainments led to a negative view of the arts in the public (ibid.).

In the late 1920s, the political situation turned more serious as Baker and Phongpaichit highlight:

Over the late 1920s, the focus of the press changed from criticism of absolutism's failings to proposals for its replacement. More articles explained Nationalisms, 1910s to 1940s 117 to readers the meaning of a constitution and the benefits of parliamentary rule. A few advocated republicanisms. Underground communist groups distributed pamphlets about revolution. With the world sliding into economic depression in 1929, criticism of the absolutist government reached a peak. In response to business petitions for government to aid the economy, Prajadhipok wondered sarcastically if they wanted 'the government to make a Five-Year Plan like Soviet Russia'. In 1927, his government had made teaching economics a criminal offence (2014, p.116-117).

King Rama VII's opinion reflects the cynical attitude of the monarchy to finances and economics. Since western education entered Siam in the reign of King Rama V, economics was also introduced as a new western knowledge and was popular among elites. Suriyanuwat noticed the problems faced by common people (farmers) in the reign of King Rama V under the constraints of the Thai *sakdina* system and inequalities. Aiming to share the solution in the way that the knowledge of economics can contribute (Suriyanuwat, 2004), he wrote his first economics textbooks titled *supphayasart 1, 2* for teaching in school. They were officially published in 1911 but after their publication, these textbooks were heavily criticised by the elites, namely Prince Vajiravudh, and therefore were eventually banned by the government. Furthermore, King Rama VII did not allow the teaching of economics in his reign (Trissadikhun, 2021).

A major event in Thai history occurred on 24 June 1932 when the People's Party recruited around a hundred members to stage a coup d'état to end absolute monarchy. The Commander of the royal guard was captured, and approximately 40 members of the royal family and their aides were arrested. The People's Party announced the downfall of absolute monarchy and public reaction generally

supported these results. On the night of 24 June, Rama VII decided to cooperate with the People's Party and prohibited any violent action (Baker and Phongpaichit, 2014). On 10 December 1932 he presented a new constitution to the people and became the first constitutional king of Siam and announced his abdication in 1935.

4.2.6 The arts as a political instrument after the 1932 revolution

The early period of constitutional monarchy saw the re-establishment of the Fine Arts Department³⁴ (Krom Silapakon) in 1933, under the Ministry of Education rather than the former Ministry of Royal Palace. It was responsible for all national cultural activities (Fine Arts Department, 2020). Moreover, in 1934, the Rongrain Nataduriyangkhasat, a music and classical dance training school, was established under the French 'conservatoire' model at the suggestion of Luang Wichitwathakan who first directed the Fine Arts Department and later the Minister of Culture (Rutnin, 2012). In the same year, Phra Chen Duriyanga, a court musician and composer, and his orchestra were transferred to the Fine Arts Department where the ensemble had performed on special occasions and ceremonies as the Fine Art Orchestra, a forerunner of today's National Symphony Orchestra. Although Phra Chen Duriyanga focused his efforts on promoting western music and conducting this orchestra until the 1960s, he received little official encouragement (Visiting Arts, 2002).

The Rongrian Praneet Silpakam (School of Fine Arts) was set up in 1933 under the Fine Arts Department. Initially, only training programmes in sculpture and painting were offered, with tuition fees being waived for the students and government officers (Silpakorn University, 2021). In 1943, it was upgraded to become Silpakorn University (the University of Fine Arts) managed by Corrado Feroci³⁵, an Italian sculptor who is often called the father of Thai modern art. The art training curriculum was based largely on the European art academy style. Art exhibitions were organised and evolved into the annual National Art Exhibition in 1949 (Visiting Arts, 2002). While new arts and culture departments and institutions were established in early years after 1932, the leaders of the revolution held all the administrative power. Thai politics remained shaky, with two coups occurring in the year after new political system, on 1st April 1933 and on 20th June 1933 (Wyatt, 2003).

One leader who played a significant role in the history of arts and culture in Thailand was Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, who held power in two periods: 1938-1944 and 1947-1957. In his first regime (1938-1944) overlapping with the Second World War, cultural development was considered

³⁴ The Fine Arts Department was first founded in 1911 by King Rama VI, but in 1926 was merged into a division under the Office of the Royal Society under King Rama VII. (Fine Arts Department, 2020)

³⁵ Corrado Feroci is the birth name of 'Professor Silpa Bhirasri, an Italian sculptor who was commissioned during the reign of King Rama VI to work in the Fine Arts Department. He subsequently enlarged the classes to include more members of the interested public before taking his initiative in setting up the School of Fine Arts. The school gradually developed and was officially accorded a new status and named, Silpakorn University, on 12 October 1943' (Silpakorn University, 2021)

to be a key function of the government in its nation-building efforts and believed to play an active role in fostering a sense of patriotism. In this first period after the end of absolute monarchy, the state used culture as a tool for propagating governmental power and ideology (Laochokchaikul and Ratnatilaka Na Bhuket, 2024). The main policy of his government was 'Building the nation by westernization'³⁶. Phibunsongkhram stressed a revolutionary cultural policy aiming to improve Thai culture in preparation for possible western countries' invasion which included a new standard of behaviour and clothing habits, among other elements.

In 1938, a Division of Culture was set up under the Fine Arts Department, followed by two National Cultural Preservation Acts in 1940 and 1942 (B.E. 2483 and B.E. 2485) which aimed to nourish a national culture 'which for the first time provided a definition of culture, stipulating that all citizens had a responsibility to safeguard the national culture and observe cultural norms' (ibid.). This Act is crucial because it defines 'culture' (*wattanatham*) as 'the characteristics that show prosperity and good order, harmonious progress of the nation and good morals of the people' (Ministry of Culture, 2022). This notion of culture makes it the duty of Thai citizens to follow the national culture, which must 'promote the progress of the Thai nation by maintaining good traditions and helping to improve and maintain it better with the times' (ibid.).

One remarkable policy that Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram launched in his first regime was *Ratthaniyom* or Cultural Mandates (Table 4), which were a dozen guidelines published in the Thai Royal Gazette between 1939 and 1942 stipulating the government's preferred practices for Thai citizens to pursue as a part of their contributing to national greatness.

These Cultural Mandates 'practically helped to uplift the national spirit and moral code and to install a sense of adaptability and a "newness" in Thai life', according to Thamsuk Numnonda (1978, p. 235). Numnonda further argues that 'the Cultural Mandates created a psychological feeling among the Thais that their country had been entered a new era. The Government kept appealing to the public to adapt themselves in the new society' (ibid., p. 235).

³⁶ Westernisation spread over most of the world and its peoples as part of colonial processes and it continues to be an important cultural phenomena that shaped globalisation. It is 'the adoption of the practices and culture of western Europe by societies and countries in other part of the world, whether through compulsion or influence' (Britannica, 2023). The United States, the outcome of Western European colonisation of North America, undoubtedly became the most prominent exporter of Western culture in the twentieth century (ibid.).

Table 4: Ratthaniyom or Twelve Cultural Mandates (1939-1942)

Royal Gazette No.	Proclamation contents
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> / 24 June B.E. 2482 (1939) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1939a)	The preference of official country's name
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 2 / 3 July B.E. 2482 (1939) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1939b)	On preventing danger to the nation • 'Thai people must not engage in any business without considering the benefit and safety of the nation. • Thai people must never reveal anything to foreigners that might damage the nation. These actions are a betrayal of the nation. • Thai people must not act as agent or spokesman for foreigners without considering the benefit of the Thai nation and must not express opinion or take the side of foreigners in international disputes. These actions are a betrayal of the nation. • Thai people must not secretly purchase land on behalf of foreigners in a way that endangers the nation. These actions are a betrayal of the nation. • When a person has betrayed the nation, it is the duty of Thai people to actively and quickly put a stop to it.'
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 3 / 2 August B.E. 2482 (1939) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1939c)	To unite Thai people as mono-ethnicity of 'Thai', the name 'Thai' is used to refer to all Thai people without subdividing them.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 4/ 8 Septembers B.E. 2482 (1939) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1939d)	Code of conduct for Thais on paying respect to the national flag, national anthem and royal anthem.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 5/ 1 November B.E. 2482 (1939) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1939e)	Thais should try to support and consume Thai products that are made by Thais, originated or grown in Thailand.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 6/ 10 December B.E. 2482 (1939) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1939f)	Proclamation of the official melody and lyrics of national anthem.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 7/ 21 March B.E. 2483 (1940) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1940a)	Proclamation to propagate nation-building that needs collaboration and cooperation from all Thais.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 8/ 26 April B.E. 2483 (1940) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1940b)	Proclamation on lyrics editing of the royal anthem (Change of the word Siam in the former version to Thai)
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 9/ 24 June B.E. 2483 (1940) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1940c)	Promoting Thai language, Thai books and good civic duty by providing guidelines of using the Thai language.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 10/ 15 January B.E. 2484 (1941) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1941a)	Appropriate concept of dress in public area.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 11/ 8 September B.E. 2484 (1941) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1941b)	Preferable daily routine for being healthy Thais.
<i>Ratthaniyom</i> no. 12/ 28 January B.E. 2485 (1942) (Office of the Prime Minister, 1942)	Public awareness on protecting children and supporting senior citizens and disabled people.

In 1942, the National Cultural Preservation Act (B.E. 2483 and B.E. 2485) was revoked as the National Cultural Council was established, and Prime Minister Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, as chairman, sought to control the council and pursue what he saw as its core duties:

1. Research, adapt, preserve and promote the existing national culture.
2. Research, adapt, and define culture that should be adopted or improve further.

3. Disseminate national culture to suit the times.
4. Control and find ways to instil the national culture in the minds of the people.
5. Give opinions, consultation, and operate according to the government's objectives in activities related to the national culture by designating the National Cultural Council into 4 bureaus, namely the Bureau of Mental Culture, Bureau of Cultural Orders, Bureau of Cultural Arts, and Bureau of Literary Culture (ibid.).

This was followed, in 1943, by the promulgation of the National Cultural Act (No.2) to designate the National Cultural Council as a political agency under the supervision of the Prime Minister. This also later included a new Bureau of Women's Culture (Ministry of Culture, 2022).

The Phibunsongkhram government's cultural policies of the late 1930s and early 1940s used drama as a cultural tool to propagate the political, economic, social and cultural policies of the government, chiefly through plays and radio drama. Luang Wichitwathakan, then director of the Fine Arts Department and the Drama and Music School, sought to modernise traditional Thai arts, particularly by creating a unique nationalistic and patriotic drama which led to a major shift in aesthetics, dance, drama and music (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). Additionally, the 1942 Royal Decree Prescribing Culture Concerning Theatrical Performance used western aesthetics and categories and the Thai government used western standards as referent frameworks for categorising Thai traditional theatre. Dance-based forms of Thai traditional theatres like *khon* (masked dance drama), *lakhon nai* (inner court dance theatre), *lakhon nok* (outer court or popular dance theatre) were redefined as 'pantomime'. Thai traditional singing-based like *lakhon rong* (sung drama), *lakhon phanthatang* (music dance-drama) were identified as musicals, while *lakhon dukdamban* (singing dance drama) were categorised as 'opera' (Witayasakpan, 1992, pp. 160-161).

Other theatre forms that could not be easily placed into the western categories needed to request permission on a case-by-case basis for special consideration. Those kinds of theatres included *lakhon chatri* (the prototype of dance-drama), *nang yai* (grand shadow puppet) and *hun krobok* (rod puppet theatre). The government also prohibited or dissuaded many indigenous forms of popular theatre (like *likay*) because the content of these popular form generally used improvisation, which the government considered old-fashioned, rude and even barbaric (ibid.).

Luang Wichitwathakan saw the rhythm and pacing of classical form of court theatre, namely the 'high art forms' as boring, while popular traditional theatres were 'low art forms', and, like *likay*, seen as coarse and vulgar and ill-suited for a modern Thai middle-class theatre form (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). He thus adapted and modified classical theatrical forms like Thai classical dance-drama by adding new modern music, contemporary dialogue, and historical costumes appropriate to the period in the play instead of classical costumes (Rutnin, 2012). He blended modern theatrical methods, mostly from western and Japanese sources, with popular themes borrowed from Thailand's history and legends. Wichitwathakan was thus able to construct a dramatic formula for his propaganda plays

(Prasertsud, 1998) which made him one of the most successful dramatists in his ability to create emotionally charged scripts and intensely dramatic plots (Rutnin, 2012). Meanwhile, patriotic dramas like *Lueat Suphan* (The Blood of Suphan) and *Chao Ying Saenwi* (Princess of Saenwi), played an important role in propagating the government's messages, and allowed the performing arts to be turned toward political ends rather than aesthetic ends.

The Fine Arts Department at the time arranged a government training programme which all performing artists, including folk or local and popular traditional theatre artists, needed to take and pass an examination before gaining an official professional artist's license to perform in public (Witayasakpan, 1992, p. 162). These new forms of theatre became tools to communicate the idea of new culture and to inform the public what government recognised as modern civilised culture. Theatre troupes had to follow regulations of Fine Arts Department related to the standard of *ratthaniyom* or Cultural Mandates, avoiding any impolite dress and behaviour or action, obscene or strong language on stage (ibid., p. 166).

The focus of the first regime of Phibulsongkhram's government was on new theatrical forms made by Luang Wichitwathakan. As a result, not only were Thai popular traditional theatrical forms like *likay* and *lam tat* (indigenous repartee performance) not promoted, but classical performing arts and music such as *khon* and *lakhon* were also neglected and underdeveloped (Phuchadapirom, 2007). Both 'represented the ancient regime and therefore were outdated in both style and content' (Prasertsud, 1998, p.9). The country's culture and lifestyle were reprogrammed by Phibulsongkhram's government policies and practices. Many of his policies employed ideas of western culture and were adapted under his vision which 'took root and become part of Thai middle-class ethics, etiquette, dress, and aesthetics. Viewing the arts as embodiment of national progress, [Phubulsongkhram] emphasised them in his policy (Witayasakpan, 1992, pp. 169-170).

During World War II, Thailand allied with Japan, but when Japan lost the war, Phibulsongkhram was discredited and lost post, with Thai elites preferring a new leader. With the parliamentary refusal of two draft bills he submitted, he decided to resign on 24th July 1944. The new government of Khuang Apaiwong ended Phibulsongkhram's cultural policy, including its twelve laws and all rules. On 24th November 1946, the Royal Decree Prescribing Culture Concerning Theatrical Performance that employed western aesthetics and classification was also abolished (ibid., pp. 168-169).

4.2.7 The revival of national traditional performing arts and the political shift for economic development

Field Marshal Phibun Songkhram returned to power in a second regime lasting from 1947 to 1957. Government policy on art and culture, particularly performing arts, could be divided into two periods.

In the first period (1948-1952), government policy shifted focus to promoting classical arts and culture to represent the distinctive civilisation of the nation, which was carried out for two main reasons. Firstly, the policy of the time was related to Thailand's becoming a member of UNESCO (Phuchadapirom, 2007) in 1949³⁷. UNESCO at the time fostered the value of a unique national culture, and this strongly affected the government's priorities. Secondly, the Thai government saw communist movements as threats to national security (Buranamat, 1980). Classical art (Royal court style) which had been largely ignored after the 1932 revolution was an important thing to promote as a marker of 'Thainess' and Thai prosperity. Many projects were set up to revive traditional art and culture, the most significant of which was the revival of traditional performing arts and music by the Fine Arts Department. During this time traditional arts were seriously considered and supported by the government.

Later, the role of art and culture was stressed when the Ministry of Culture was established in 1952. It consisted of 1) Office of the Secretary to the Minister, 2) Office of the Permanent Affairs, 3) Department of Cultural Affairs, 4) Department of Religious Affairs and 5) Fine Arts Department (Ministry of Culture, 2022). Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram, acting as the Minister of Culture, aimed to foster 'culture in terms of moral, legal affairs, materials and virtues as national tradition' (ibid.). This led to a re-emphasis on preserving and developing the traditional performing arts which has remained a top priority for the ministry. While patriotic drama was reused to propagate government policy, forms of popular folk dance-drama, *likay*, as well as spoken drama and patriotic songs, were also utilised as political tools. This gave them more public interest as these performing arts appealed to the people more than classical forms did (Rutnin, 2012; Prasertsud, 1998; Phuchadapirom, 2007).

Later, in the social and political climate in the late 1950s, General Sarit Thanarat took power twice through coups, firstly from Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram on 16th September 1957 and secondly on 20th October 1958, and 'the coup established a system of "despotic paternalism"'. The government was highly authoritarian and determined to establish order and stability and to make Thailand progressive and "civilised" (Thak, 1976; 1979, cited in Hewison, 1999, p. 101). In 1957, *lese majeste* laws, tracing back to the absolute monarchy period, were integrated into a new criminal code and they remain there until today (Wongcha-um and Johnson, 2020).

In 1958, laws to amend the Ministry of Culture, the Bureau, and the Department shifted the Fine Arts Department to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Culture and the National Cultural Council were dissolved and reorganised as the Division of Culture under the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Culture, 2022). This structural change showed

³⁷ Although information from Phuchadapirom's work (2007, P. 81) stated that Thailand was officially accepted as an UNESCO member in B.E. 2490 (A.D. 1947), this research follows official information from the website of UNESCO (2022) as Thailand has been a UNESCO member since 1949.

that the government had shifted focus to economic development as a national priority. In addition, in 1961, the building of a National Theatre began, and was officially opened on 23rd December 1965 by King Bhumibol (Rama IX) and Queen Sirikit (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021).

Thailand's political situation after the Second World War became unstable and the US played an important role in the Thai government. During General Sarit Thanarat's regime, the US made many grants and loans to Thailand as economic and military assistance. Thailand was treated as an ally and became a US military base to help it counter communism's spread in the region. 'American aid supported a military build-up in Thailand that was oriented toward Laos and then, increasingly, toward the Vietnam War' (Wyatt, 2003 p.274). Baker and Phongpaichit add that 'to consolidate Thailand's membership in the "free world" camp in the Cold War, the US promoted "development", meaning primarily economic growth through private capitalism. To achieve "national security", US funding helped to push the mechanisms of the nation's state more deeply into society than before' (2014, p.139).

Marshal Thanarat welcomed a World Bank mission to assist in his government's economic plan. Thailand turned this World Bank report into the first five-year development plan of the country under a new National Economic Development Board, set up in 1961. This plan focused on infrastructure investments in transportation, irrigation, electricity, and education, but also encouraged private and foreign investment to spur economic growth (Wyatt, 2003). Baker and Phongpaichit argue that 'the US helped to set up a new bureaucratic infrastructure for promoting development – a planning board (The Office of the National Economic Development Board- NEDB), a budget bureau, investment promotion machinery, and a restructured central bank. US advisers arrived to help run of them' (2014, pp. 149-150). A decade later, in 1972, when the government decided to integrate social development into its National Plan, its name changed to the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and it has been run under the Office of the Prime Minister until now (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2021).

Succeeding National Economic and Social Development Plans (NESDP) were designed as a primary framework to foster socio-economic development of the country. The NESDPs were utilised as Comprehensive National Development Plans for all levels of state agencies, to ensure they are consistent with offices' mission, administrative action plans, operation planning and budget execution by following the national goals designated in the NESDP (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2023, p.2). This has made significant change in national policy direction, so that it is mainly focused on economic development and growth. This has also led to many changes in national arts and cultural structure as mentioned in the previous paragraph and the new economic policy direction of policy has affected the status of arts and culture until today.

The new policy direction since 1961 not only focused state investments in the main infrastructures needed for economic growth but also promoted foreign and private investment. As a result Thailand experienced a quick success in state's economic policy goals, as seen in the high rate of Gross National Product growth, i.e., 8.6 percent per year between 1959-1969, which was almost double the GNP in the prior decade (Wyatt, 2003, p. 273).

At the same time a new movement of modern western theatre emerged in Thai university education by overseas-educated English language teachers at Chulalongkorn and Thammasat Universities in Bangkok. Thailand's first Department of Dramatic Arts was established in the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University in 1966, followed by Thammasat University's Drama Department in the Faculty of Liberal Arts in 1978. (See more in Chapter 1). University students were curious about modern theatre as an intellectual form of art influenced by foreign education. They translated and adapted American and European works, as well as writing original Thai modern plays.

For many, theatre became a medium of free expression, i.e., free from censorship or state control compared to radio, television and newspapers, and was integrated into political activities by those who oppose military governments (Mahasarinand, 2016, p. 929). Key political incidents were student demonstrations and protests against the military dictatorship on 14th October 1973 and later on 6th October 1976. These protests impacted Thai classical dance-drama which was criticised for being a symbol of class division and an instrument of the monarchy to maintain its status quo (Rutnin, 2012). This echoes the attitudes of youth in times when Thai classical arts were seen to represent class division and social inequality.

In addition, during the 1970s, the government looked to revitalise opportunities in cultural development. Royal Decree No.92 Sec. 54 on 5th March 1975 (Royal Gazette, 1975) restored the old departmental structure to the Fine Art Department and a committee was assigned to study other possible options for creating alternative cultural organisations. This effort resulted in the National Culture Commission Act of 1979, the National Culture Commission, and the creation of a secretariat.

During the first two decades of the first four National Economic and Social Development Plans (1961-1981), Thailand's government faced political turmoil as three successful coups took place: on 17th October 1971, 6th October 1976 and 20th October 1977. Despite this, economic-driven policy affected rapid change, particularly in Bangkok as the city's size expanded three times, leading to typical urban problems of congestion and air pollution. High-rise buildings with commercial companies, along with tourist hotels, apartment buildings and government offices mushroomed in Bangkok, while factories were built in Bangkok's suburban areas. These urban developments did not only happen in Bangkok, but also in larger provincial towns like Hat Yai in the south, Phitsanulok in the central region, Chiangmai in the north, Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen and Udon Thani in the northeast. Infrastructure and new systems

reached rural villages as all-weather road construction, electricity and piped water supply systems, secondary schools and television sets (Wyatt, 2003, p. 282).

The new economic focus of the country's policy in the first 20 years of NESDP put the accountability for cultural activities on several ministries dealing with Thai lifestyle until a new National Cultural Policy emerged under the government of Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda in 1981 (Laochokchaikul and Ratnatilaka Na Bhuket, 2024). This is a result of the new 1978 Constitution whose article 64 said that 'the state should foster and preserve the national culture' (Office of the Prime Minister, 1981, p.4432). This resulted in a new national cultural policy (B.E. 2524/ A.D. 1981) with five guidelines for action in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13 Five guidelines in the National Cultural Policy (B.E. 2524/ A.D. 1981)

1. Foster and promote the protection, preservation and restoration of all Thai culture aspects by using education, research to develop Thai culture. Employ culture as an important tool for solving problem on living, developing country, economics, politics and national defence. Prevent the demolition of culture and religion and maintain the religion's purity as a foundation for people's mind development.
2. Publicise all Thai culture aspects to the citizens and encourage more public practices to have knowledge, understanding and awareness to the culture as it represents national identity, pride, unity and stability of the nation as well as domestically and internationally understanding each other.
3. Foster local and ethnic cultures for the public comprehension, appreciation and accepting each other's local culture leading to harmonious cohabitation in the nation as well as to love and cherish more on Thai culture.
4. Promote and advocate international cultural exchanges to encourage understanding between countries, including know how to select foreign cultures that have been promoted in Thailand or as a result from cultural exchange by filtering, enhancing and adapting to suit Thai people's way of life and remaining national security.
5. Promote and support cultural related government agencies and private corporates to closely coordinate each other by synergising both public and private sectors to preserve and foster the stability of culture as it is a foundation people's livings. Advocating the cooperation on solving the cultural related problems, hence culture can have a role in enabling country's development.

(Office of the Prime Minister , 1981, pp. 4432-4433)

Two interesting points of cultural policy in 1981 are noteworthy. First is the third guideline referring to foster local and ethnic cultures for the public comprehension, and the appreciation and accepting each other's local culture. This guideline demonstrates that government started to be more aware and inclusive of the many indigenous groups as they are. Second is the emphasis on international cultural exchange. Although it was shown that the Thai government recognised culture in a transnational context, this statement about international exchanges appears with defensive attitude and an awareness of changes in Thainess due to foreign influences. In terms of real practice, however, national culture is still largely dominated by traditional culture of Thai elites in Bangkok, as Laochokchaikul and Ratnatilaka Na Bhuket (2024) argue.

Five years later, in 1986, a more detailed framework for preserving, promoting and developing culture emerged from the Office of the Prime Minister. This framework gave additional details of the previous cultural policy, offering more concrete and practical guidelines, particularly on cultural planning in the short- and long-term, systematically connecting the national level to local level plans, cultural development groups among public agencies, and private sector and international organisations. The direction of these guidelines are typically based on 1) preserving and restoring culture as a marker of national identity (Nationhood, Religion, Monarchy) and heritage, 2) encouraging culture to reflect national religion or Buddhism as a foundation of Thai way of life, and 3) monarchy, political institutions as national ideologies and security. There were also issues of democracy included in the policy and the aim of fostering public activities to collect opinions about public preferences about conducting and managing cultural activities. Additionally, promoting any actions to support better understanding of local, regional and indigenous cultures are also indicated, provided that those practices do not affect the overall security of Thai society (Office of the Prime Minister, 1986, pp. 6-16).

4.2.8 Re-establishment of the ministry of culture in 2002 to present

After the dissolution of the Ministry of Culture in 1958, Thailand took 44 years to restore it, providing a platform for government to consider art and culture. A 2002 Restructuring of the Government Agencies Act by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's government (in power 2001 to 2006) sought to reform bureaucracy. This included the re-establishment of the Ministry of Culture in a new government organisation, with its core missions including religious activities, arts and culture (Ministry of Culture, 2022). There were departmental-level entities such as the Minister's Office, the Permanent Secretary's Office of the Ministry of Culture, the Department of Religion, the Fine Arts Department, the National Culture Commission and the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture. There was also a provincial administrative entity, the Provincial Cultural Office placed under the Permanent Secretary's Office. Moreover, three other public organisations³⁸ have come under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture: The Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (Public Organisation) set up in November 2000; the Film Archive (Public Organisation), founded in June 2009 (ibid.); and Centre for Morality Promotion (Public Organisation) which has been a public organisation since 2011 (Centre for Morality Promotion, 2023).

³⁸ A Public Organisation in Thailand was created from the Master Plan for Public Sector Reforms B.E. 2540-2544 (A.D. 1997-2001) to enhance and reengineer efficiency in working process which is normally in bureaucratic manner for government agencies. A Public Organisation is a third type of the government organisation and is distinct from either a conventional bureaucratic organisation or a state enterprise. The government recognised that some public service management methods might not suit a bureaucratic organisation model or a state enterprise, so the Thai government set up the Public Organisation Act 1999 for a non-profit organisation which is more flexible and responsive in terms of managerial efficiency (Pongsapan, 2017, p. 10).

Another key significant action was the creation of the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture (OCAC) in 2002. This organisation shows the first awareness by the Thai government of the importance of contemporary arts and culture in relation to the dynamics of current cultural life and global mobility. The OCAC focuses on nine art forms: architecture, fashion, film, graphic design, interior design, literature, music, performing arts and visual arts. The OCAC consists of four departments as follows:

1. General Affairs Division
2. Resource and Information Institute
3. Funds and Network Relations Centre
4. Art Centre

In 2002, a government policy to develop creative industries in Thailand also started. Many independent organisations, such as the Office of Knowledge Management and Development (OKMD), Thailand Creative and Design Centre, National Science Museum (NSM), Office of Tourism Development and Software Industry Promotion Agency, have been established to develop know-how and to oversee activities related to the creative economy. Although these infrastructures were established for long-term development in the creative industries, the policies and operation of these organisations lacked integration, continuity and consistent operations.

The first decade of the Ministry of Culture was the most active and progressive period, particularly the OCAC, under the vision of Professor Dr. Apinan Poshyananda who served as the Director-General between 2003 and 2009. Thailand hosted an Asia-Europe Seminar on Cultural Policy in Bangkok in June 2004, initiated by Rod Fisher from the International Intelligence on Culture, London, and was co-organised with the Ministry of Culture with support from Asia-Europe Foundation and professional support from Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. Fisher used the theme of the seminar 'Developing new instruments to meet cultural policy challenges' to cautiously 'address some key policy challenges confronting governments and their civil servants or the agency they employ to distribute government support' (Fisher, 2005, p. 21). The seminar raised hopes for action by the newly re-established Ministry of Culture in many topics discussed by international speakers, scholars, policy makers from over 20 countries. There were crucial points of common concerns on cultural policy challenges at that time, i.e., globalisation, cultural diversity, decentralisation, culture in the education system, cultural industries and the promotion of creativity, support for international cultural co-operation, resources and public-private partnerships. It also included a session on 'Multiple priorities and minimal resources: ensuring a policy balance between the heritage and the contemporary'. Poshyananda, the Director-General of OCAC, points out that

Now, the global-local view tends to give the idea that the homogeneity of the new world order reaches everywhere. On the contrary, many people feel that locality is

very much something we need to grasp, and ensure that we don't lose our local identity, or what in Thai is called *attaluk*. I think it is important to avoid falling into the trap of regarding heritage as the opposition of the modern: West versus East, Europe versus Asia and so on (2005, pp. 94-95).

Even though the difficulties of balancing heritage with contemporaneity were discussed in this session, these issues addressed show that the Thai government at that time was enthusiastic but also aware of the need for more flexible definitions.

In September 2006, the Royal Thai Army staged another coup, the 12th successful coup and the first in 15 years. This coup happened after a year-long weekly demonstrations of pro-monarchy 'yellow³⁹ shirt group' (People's Alliance for Democracy: PAD), protesting against the Prime Minister's rumoured Thaksinocracy or Thaksin Populism and corruption, e.g., trading stocks without paying tax, issues on conflict of interest, and intention to overthrow the monarchy (Krairirk, 2020). Thai politics has remained in turmoil, so that between 2006-2008, Thailand saw four prime Ministers: Surayud Chulanont (October 2006-January 2008), Samak Sundaravej (January 2008-September 2008), Somchai Wongsawat (September 2008-December 2008), followed by another bout of violence and the appointment of Abhisit Vejjajiva as PM (December 2008-July 2011) (Royal Thai Government, 2024).

From October 2009, the government of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva sought to promote a creative economy in Thailand, using two new official groups. Firstly, the Office of the Public Sector Development Commission was appointed to study guidelines for setting up the Thailand Creative Economy Agency for this policy. Secondly, the Thai Khem Khaeng Committee was to be responsible for screening projects operated under the programme 'Thailand: Investing from Strength to Strength'. One billion baht was planned for the central administration of the Thailand Creative Economy Agency, while another 21 billion baht was set aside to support creative economy projects by various government agencies. The government launched the policy to position Thailand as a creative economy hub in Asia and intended to raise the percentage of GDP in creative economy value. The succeeding 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) included creative economy issues for the first time (Government Public Relations Department, 2010).

Thailand's creative industry consist of 15 industry groups: 1) craft industries, 2) design, 3) visual arts, 4) fashion, 5) broadcasting, 6) films and videos, 7) advertising, 8) performing arts, 9) music, 10) architecture, 11) publishing, 12) software, 13) Thai traditional medicine, 14) Thai food and 15) tourism. In 2017, 9.1 percent of Thailand's GDP, or approximately 1.4 trillion baht, was generated

³⁹ People's Alliance for Democracy: PAD adopted the colour yellow to show their loyalty to the monarchy as yellow is the colour of King Rama IX's birthday (Monday). In 2009, this PAD group was abolished after its leader was sniped. However, later in 2013, the new yellow shirt group was formed by the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) to oppose PM Yingluck (Krairirk, 2020).

by the creative industries. The economic value of the top 5 industries were: tourism (0.36 trillion baht), Thai food (0.27 trillion baht), advertising (0.2 trillion baht); fashion (0.18 trillion baht) and crafts (0.09 trillion baht). In addition, the total economic value of art related industries, particularly, visual arts, performing arts, music, film and videos and broadcasting was 0.077 trillion baht (Creative Economy Agency, 2017).

Under Prime Minister Abhisit (2008-2011), demonstrations by a pro-Thaksin, 'red shirt group' known as United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), criticised the government as they believed that the military had been backing up PM Abhisit government and the justice system employed a double-standard, which resulted in the government disbanding the party that most people voted for. The 2011 elections restored the red-shirt supported pro-Thaksin Phue Thai Party led by Yingluck Shinnawatra, the sister of former PM Thaksin, who became the Prime Minister. That resulted in an ongoing set of counter protests by the 'yellow shirts' or People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) who criticised the Yingluck government and the opposing 'red shirts' (UDD) who supported Prime Minister Yingluck. The demonstrations of yellow shirt group became more serious between 2013 and 2014 as central Bangkok was shut down by opposing Yellow and Red shirt groups as they occupied many prime areas in Bangkok for their demonstrations (Krairirk, 2020).

These public conflicts finally led to General Prayut Chan-o-cha, the commander of the Royal Thai Army, seizing power from PM Yingluck in Thailand's 13th successful coup in May 2014. This most recent coup is a significant incident and has affected contemporary Thailand since. Much public discussion has emerged on democracy; issues about human rights was banned; and censorship is led by the National Council for Peace and Order. Hundreds of activists and dissenters have been subjected to allegations of criminal activities, ranging from treason to cyber-crimes and insulting the monarchy (*lese majeste*) for their attempts to freely express themselves. Pro-democracy movements and gatherings in public of more than five persons were banned. Thousands had been interrogated and forced to stop voicing their political opinions, and many were jailed for days without getting access to attorneys or protections against maltreatment (Phasuk, 2018). In addition, a few months after the coup, the Head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) announced the following set of twelve state values that should be recognised by Thai people.

Figure 14 The twelve core values of Thais
(Thairath Online, 2014)

The twelve core values of Thais

- One: love the nation, religion and Monarch
- Two: be honest, self-sacrificing and resilient
- Three: have utmost gratitude towards parents
- Four: be determined and persistent in studies
- Five: uphold national culture
- Six: sustain moral standard, religion
- Seven: learn and know about the sovereignty of the people
- Eight: maintain discipline and Thai law
- Nine: act in accordance with His Majesty's words
- Ten: live with sufficiency; be able to sustain oneself
- Eleven: be gardy in both body and mind
- Twelve: put first the common good

Translated by Michael Sloggett in
Thairath Online, 2014

Alongside the campaign to promote and encourage these twelve values to the general public and in public schools all over the country, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha also highlighted the narratives of the '*Pracharath* or Civil state' and also '*Thainiyom* or Thai admiration'. The discourse of 'Civil state' was used in the announcement of state policy to solve economic problems by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and was used as a strategy, '*san phalang pracharat phuea setthakit than rak* [Synergy of civil state power for grassroots economy]', in a policy to propel the country by the mechanism of a civil state strategy which synergises the coordination of state, private sector and civil society (Nuamcharoen, 2022, p. 53). In addition, for the narrative of 'Thai admiration', Prime Minister Prayut argues that

[*Thainiyom* is extended and developed from *Pracharath* which is promoted to motivate internal explosion, participation, co-responsibility, then the government will seek corporation from the private sector and academic sector to become 'a 3-way coordination of civic, state, [and] private sector. This concept will not put anyone in particular at an advantage because all of us are in the same economic chain, because we are in the same country...'] (Prachachat, 2018, Translation mine).

He additionally points out how *Thainiyom* differs from *chatniyom* (nationalism) or *prachaniyom* (populism), 'but the country's situation is undergoing a transition. We need to reform on the basis of "Thainess" but not neglecting international principles' (ibid.).

Prime Minister Prayut also employed mass media communication techniques both to promote the positive image of righteous military government, and to boost the spirit of Thainess among the public.

He released 10 of his own music singles in the nine-year period of his government for special occasions, writing the lyrics himself with a music score arrangement team to produce the songs. The government utilised these songs to communicate the government's ideology by broadcasting them in various mass media platforms. The first song, the government's theme song, was 'Returning Happiness to Thailand' conveys the government's promise to bring stability to the country and happiness to Thai people (Komchadluek Online, 2019). The other songs list and brief contents appear in table 5 below.

Table 5: List of songs written by Prime Minister Prayut during his term

Song name	Brief content (ibid.)
เพราะเธอคือประเทศไทย Because you are Thailand	This song was arranged to be a new year present for Thai people.
ความหวัง ความศรัทธา Hope, Faith	Its content aims to synergise the power of Thainess physically and psychologically.
สะพาน The Bridge	The bridge is a metaphor for the government who is ready for Thai people to walk on and cross over to the hopeful future.
ใจเพชร Diamond heart	It encourages Thai people to unite in overcoming all obstacles, keep the faith and move forward together hand-in-hand.
สู้เพื่อแผ่นดิน Fight for the land	This song was arranged to empower all people of virtue in the face of criticism.
ในความทรงจำ Inside the memory	This song talks about using past failures as a lesson for a better future and not repeating them.
วันใหม่ New day	New Day means hope or what we are waiting for. Whether it a nice day or a bad day, it up to us.
มิตรภาพ Friendship	This song was launched on the occasion of the opening of the bridge between Thailand and Cambodia.
มาร์ชไทยคือไทย Thai-is-Thai March	Patriotic song to encourage the love and pride of the long and glorious history of the nation.

The last song seems to be a conclusion of the government's ideology as translated in brief below.

[Thailand has a glorious and long history to be proud of with sustained three pillars of the country: nation, religion and king. Thais should love the nation endlessly as our ancestors had sacrificed their lives to protect this land for us. We must protect our beloved home with our lives and help to develop it. To be born as a Thai must inherit Thainess creatively, determines to do good deeds and remembers to have the king in our heart] (Thai-is-Thai March, Translation mine.).

This song conveys the preferred qualities of Thai people by the state and emphasises that Thai people should be loyal to the monarchy and always keep the king in their hearts.

In addition, in 2015, Thai military government launched a publication of '[History of Thai nation]' edited by the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture, as the latest official book on history of the country. It contains some controversial issues, particularly in discussing the recent 'Period of political reformation B.E. 2535 (1992) to present'. It is only four pages long and has led to many criticisms among Thai scholars and historians (Aphornsuvan, 2018; Kasetsiri, 2018; Luechai, 2018; Piromanukun, 2018 cited in Teeranate, 2018). Most pointed out the bias and distortion of facts (ibid.) in this version of Thai history, which claimed that in Thai political incidents since 1992, the military has had legitimacy to protect the country from immoral politicians. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha in particular is presented as a hero who returned Thai politics to an authentic democracy by eliminating corruption and administrating the country in a moral way (Fine Arts Department, 2015, p. 195).

Besides using music to soften his political messages and ideologies and releasing a new version of Thai history to public, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has also highlighted the need for the *lese-majeste* law⁴⁰ (article 112 of Thailand's criminal code) to safeguard the monarchy and the state (BBC News, 2017). While in power, this government had to confront much social resistance especially among young people who had grown up in the period of political conflicts between yellow-shirts and red-shirts, and nearly a decade of a military government. There have been many demonstrations by groups of young people who think differently and disagree with the government's ideologies, with many young protesters having been charged and sentenced for violating article 112. Some Thai contemporary performing artists responded to this resistance by producing performances to reflect this conflict as previously mentioned in Section 1.3.2 of the Introduction.

The government under Prime Minister Prayut has made a significant shift in national reform. In 2017, the Strategic Transformation Office (STO) was established by the Order of the Head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Number 19/2018 (B.E. 2561). The STO is a key government agency that drives the country's reform, as a National Strategy, coupled with Reconciliation Plans. This 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037) was published as Thailand's first long-term comprehensive strategic plan, seeking national develop under the vision of 'Thailand, a nation of stability, prosperity, and sustainability, is a developed nation according to the economic philosophy' (Strategic Transformation Office, 2017). This long-term national strategy will be discussed below in the next section.

⁴⁰ Section 112. Insulting or Defaming Royal Family: "Whoever, defames, insults or threatens the King, the Queen, the Heir-apparent or the Regent, shall be punished with imprison of three to fifteen years" (Thai Law Library, 2024).

4.2.9 Sixty years of twelve National Economic and Social Development Plans (1961-2021)

As stated in section 4.2.7, the country's policy has shifted to an economic focus since 1961 through the succession of five-year National Economic and Social Development Plans. During this research, the Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) was in place. It aimed for creating what is called Thailand 4.0 as a value-based economy that uses innovation, high-quality services, creativity and new technology to enhance the quality of life for Thai people. Three remarkable goals for Thailand 4.0 have changed the production and economy in the nation: 1) levelling up into a high-income nation group; 2) developing towards an inclusive society; and 3) concentrating on sustainable development and growth (Start up in Thailand, 2018).

From a contemporary policy perspective, this section will discuss twelve NEADPs, twenty-year National Strategy and the OCAC's Action Plan to Foster Contemporary Arts and Culture, 2020- 2022, starting from the twelve National Economic and Social Development Plans that have been used as a national roadmap for over 60 years. The discussion focuses on the frequency of five keywords: 1) culture; 2) art or arts; 3) creative economy; 4) creative industries and 5) contemporary which appear in each NESDP. The results are shown in Table 6 below. In addition, it presents the contexts in which these keywords appeared in each NESDP (Table 7).

Table 6: Frequency of keywords used in twelve NESDPs and twenty-year National Strategy

NESDP no.	Total no. of pages	Frequency of keywords used in the plan				
		วัฒนธรรม (Culture)	ศิลป์, ศิลปะ (Art)	เศรษฐกิจสร้างสรรค์ (Creative Economy)	อุตสาหกรรมสร้างสรรค์ (Creative Industries)	ร่วมสมัย (Contemporary)
1 st (1961-1966)	290	4 times	4 times	-	-	
2 nd (1967-1971)	327	9 times	8 times	-	-	
3 rd (1972-1976)	454	19 times	30 times	-	-	
4 th (1977-1981)	378	43 times	43 times	-	-	
5 th (1982-1986)	420	128 times	48 times	-	-	
6 th (1987-1991)	369	31 times	11 times	-	-	
7 th (1992-1996)	220	43 times	16 times	-	-	
8 th (1997-2001)	153	79 times	18 times	-	-	
9 th (2002-2006)	133	57 times	11 times	-	-	
10 th (2007-2011)	497	396 times	2 times	-	-	
11 th (2012-2016)	169	111 times	5 times	15 times	4 times	3 times
12 th (2017-2021)	224	75 times	8 times	1 time	7 times	1 time

Table 7: Contexts in which keywords were used in twelve NESDPs

Contexts in which keywords were used	NESDP No.											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Preservation, restoration of national arts and culture by monitoring threats from foreign cultures / to strengthen Thai culture	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The role of state enterprises in economic development	○											
As art related subjects in development of national education		○	○	○								
Religions and fine arts: national arts and cultural heritage preservation/ development of Thai traditional arts craftsmanship/ promoting Thai traditional dances and music			○	○								
Fostering to develop cultural management								○				
Public relations on national arts and culture				○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Fostering occupations related to traditional Thai arts, local or folk arts and cultures/ preservation of local or folk arts and cultures				○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Fostering and enhancing arts and culture education and develop arts and culture for tourism				○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Developing people based on arts, culture (including local culture) and religion's frameworks					○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Building pride in Thainess, Thai identity								○	○	○	○	○
Fostering international cultural exchanges and increase understanding with global communities								○		○	○	○
Fostering creative economy and creative industries											○	○
Monitoring the development of communication and digital technologies, economic growth and globalisation that impact the praiseworthy original national culture											○	○
Fostering science, technology and innovation based creative industries												○
Fostering the comprehension and respect in intellectual property right												○
Fluidity of global culture that permeates in local culture affects the changing way of local life and consumption pattern of the people												○
Preservation of local or township identity and generate income from creating value by local resources												○

Until 1987, the NESDP lacks much mention of arts and culture in its plans. The first National Economic Development Plan (1961-1966, divided into two periods: 1961-1963 and 1964-1966) has few references related to arts and culture, understandable perhaps since it is an economic plan. From 290 pages of the first phase document and 218 pages of its second phase document, the word 'culture' appears 4 times, and the word 'art or arts' appears 3 times, always in the context of preserving national culture, but with no specific policy. In addition, arts and culture are mentioned in

this plan due to developments in other fields like the economic development of state enterprises. In the second plan (1967-1971), social issues were included leading to the new name of the National Economic and Social Development Plan. 'Culture' was used there 9 times to glorify national institutions, i.e., nationhood and religion, while 'art or arts' was used 8 times in relation to educational development via the arts as a subject in standard school curricula. Arts and culture in national education development were emphasised in the following 3rd NESDP (1972-1976), which stresses arts as a subject in all levels and types of public educational, including schools, universities, colleges of fine arts, and adult education. Moreover, arts and culture were mentioned in the section on Religions and Fine Arts under the topic of social development, which focused on Thai traditional arts and cultural development, preservation and restoration of national heritage.

In the fourth NESDP (1977-1981), arts and culture were used 43 times, referring to issues of preservation and restoration in Thai traditional arts and culture like in the previous plan. This plan emphasised limiting foreign cultural influences, public relations on Thai arts and culture, protection, preservation, and maintenance of arts and cultural heritage, fostering occupations related to Thai arts and local arts, and promoting and enhancing arts and culture education. Interestingly the policy makers' views of these issues mirrored the government's basic economic and nationalist focus as noted in its section on Social Development, which deals with the current situation and main problems in arts and culture, as quoted below.

Thailand has its own cultural and artistic identity inherited from ancient predecessors. Thai culture is reflected through old traditions, language, dress and works of art as can be seen everywhere. Nowadays, with rapid economic and social growth, traditional culture has undergone significant changes. Traditional Thai culture is now less prominent than it used to be, and international ways have been adopted more and more...The political awakening of the younger generation steered young people away from traditional values towards modern ways of thinking and new political movements. This has been reflected in their demand for equal rights and social justice and through musical expression and literature praising new ways of life in the new society. This exposure to new values and attitudes led young people away from the traditional Thai culture (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020, pp. 310-311).

This paragraph in the 4th plan echoes two views of the Thai government. Firstly, the first two sentences illustrate the government's view on Thai culture and identity as ancient heritage. Secondly, the latter part of the paragraph reflects that the Thai government considered political protests and awakening movements, equal rights and social justice through music and literature, and new foreign influences as threats for Thai traditional arts and culture. This shows how the state realised the importance of national policy and plan for national arts and culture, as seen in its statement that 'a national policy and plan for arts and culture does not exist and a shortage of high-ranking officials responsible for this task has made things worse. Agencies concerned with art and cultural affairs are scattered in various departments, each operating on its own' (ibid., 284). This

illustrates the state's goal to re-start work on heritage-focused cultural policy after arts and culture had been ignored in previous NESDPs (plans 1-3). This 4th NESDP under the government of Prem Tinsulanonda launched a National Cultural Policy in 1981 (See Section 4.2.6).

The fifth NESDP (1982-1986) uses the word 'culture' 128 times, and 48 times for 'art or arts'. Despite the higher frequency of the word 'culture' here, most uses occurred in the context of preservation, maintenance, and protection of national culture as national identity. The issue of promoting local arts and culture in other regions is explicitly seen in this plan. Foreign influences that are not suitable for Thai customs and affect the decline of the general public's attention on national arts and culture were highlighted as government was uneasy about this threat. The importance of a unified system for cultural affairs management was raised in this plan, and a master plan for national culture development was formulated to enhance the efficient coordination of each implementing agency and also to encourage cooperation from local and private sector to preserve and develop national heritage with the state. There were plans to establish 4 colleges of performing arts and 15 polytechnic colleges in regional areas. The policies related to tourism promotion, the values of arts and culture were indicated are also significant resources for tourism.

With the succeeding sixth (1987-1991) and seventh (1992-1996) NESDPs, there is a continued emphasis on preserving arts and culture as national heritage, national identity and issues related to religion. Promoting the arts and cultural exchanges between local areas and the issue of preserving arts and culture as resources for tourism were foci of the sixth plan while the seventh plan stressed using arts and cultural resources including ancient attractions and artefacts to promote tourism.

The eighth NESDP (1997-2001) gave more attention to promoting arts and culture than the previous 7 plans by emphasising on culture for country and human development, building pride in Thai arts and culture, building pride of being Thai and promoting Thainess. The arts and cultures of ethnic and minority groups were first recognised in this plan, as the Thai government paid attention to Thai people of different cultures. Arts and culture for tourism was stressed in this plan as well. Cultural exchange with other countries was also presented to enhance a better understanding in global society. Besides identifying cultural management as important, there is an emphasis on increasing cultural support funding. Additionally, amending laws and rules related to arts and cultural affairs were also highlighted, as was enhancing operational efficiency by decentralising activities to local agencies. Despite these developments, state's views on arts and culture still sat in a framework of conservation, preservation, and national heritage, which remain central to the 9th NESDP (2002-2006). Local arts and culture for tourism was raised here, including potential services that could create local jobs and incomes from local tourism.

Strikingly, the tenth NESDP (2007-2011), which was drafted after re-establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 2002, shows a significant growth in the use of the word 'culture', which was used 396 times, while 'arts or art' were mentioned only twice. 'Culture' often appears superfluously, mainly in contexts of conservation, preservation, restoration of national arts and culture. The awareness on arts and culture protection from global influences was also emphasised and a definition of culture that linked itself to Buddhism and the goodness of Thai morality. A distinctive feature in this plan was its aim to foster local culture and its wisdom as a resource for economic development, including trade and services such as local products, foods, crafts, wellness services (Thai massage), local tourism, all of which were connected with local products for the tourism industry that fostered cooperation between local communities and the private sector. The sustainable economy philosophy of King Rama IX was employed to strengthen local communities, along with leveraging local cultural and wisdom with new technologies. This plan highlighted the new trend of Asia's popularity in tourism as an economic opportunity for the country. The inclusive issues of Thai culture and diversity, culture and lifelong learning were also cited in this plan. These developments in Southeast Asia were critically reviewed in the first inter-disciplinary book on the growth of tourism in the region, which includes discussions on the relationship between this relatively new industry and the arts (Hitchcock, King and Parnwell, 1993).

The eleventh NESDP (2012-2016) promoted King Rama IX's ideology of the sustainable economy. Three new phrases – creative economy (15 times), creative industry (4 times) and contemporary (3 times) – appeared for the first time in this NESDP. Even though this plan recognised the role of communication technologies for development, economic growth and globalisation influences, the government considered the current situations as a threats to the quality of Thai cultural and customs. These became the focus for the state as they were considered threats to the country's culture. For example, in a section on social change, contemporary sub-cultures that emerged from globalisation and online communication technologies were said to be online communities' sub-cultures and therefore 'were unable to explicitly represent Thainess' (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020m, p. 9) and may lead to a moral decline in the country. The idea of cultural democracy and good governance were also mentioned along with promoting the role of local communities and multi-cultures like local dialects and local cultures to help them become community enterprises, with local cultures supporting tourism and the creative economy. An additional stress on cultural networking and exchange with international communities appeared, especially with ASEAN countries. Overall, the context of the word 'culture' (111 times) in this plan remained focused on preservation, conservation, and restoration of arts and culture with religious based attitudes and the promotion of Thainess.

The 12th NESDP (2017-2021) focused on how Thailand 4.0 as a framework for a value-based economy using innovation, high-quality services, creativity and new technology for enhancing the quality of life, together with the integration of sustainable economy philosophy as a framework. Art or arts were encouraged in children and youth development in school with the cooperation of local communities by facilitating community-based creative spaces for arts and cultural activities. This plan pursued the promotion on arts and cultural tourism to generate income, like in previous plans. Culture and the creative industries were boldly integrated with digital technologies to help add value by producing high value products and services. Interestingly, the fluidity of globalisation influencing local cultures, their lifestyle and consumption was now seen as an advantage and a new opportunity for local communities to market their creative commodities and services and increase income to the country. By contrast, too much cultural influx was seen as potentially threatening because Thai people were less able to filter or carefully selected what was good in culture. As a result, Thais were often unaware of their national identity, and may engage in wasteful behaviours and not respect other people's rights. Such developments have contributed to the erosion and loss of Thai traditional culture's values and undesirable behaviours in Thai society (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020n, p. 26).

Throughout the 60 years of the twelve National Economic and Social Development Plans that were key policy statements, arts and culture were stressed more since the fourth plan (1977-1981), after which the Thai government proclaimed the first cultural policy in 1981 since when Thailand shifted to an economic focus in the NESDP. Besides economic development, there has been more emphasis on the role of arts and culture from being national heritage and pride of the country to being a means to enhance social development and support economic growth through concepts of the creative economy, and arts and cultural products and services for tourism. Importantly, the focal points on culture and the arts in all plans are preservation, conservation, restoration, protection of national arts and culture as national heritage. Additionally, from national culture perspectives, global changes and international influences in contemporary time have typically been seen as a menace for traditional arts and culture, Thai identity, Thainess and Thai virtues. Yet, from an economic perspective, the recent stress on culture has been valued for its potential to contribute to the national economy, considered as money making opportunities in the global arena. Yet another big change in country policy making occurred in 2017 when the National Economic and Social Development Plan had lost its importance as the top policy tool for the country.

4.2.10 The first long-term national development plan: 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037)

The 20-year National Strategy was launched as the country's first high level plan with 6 key areas of concentrations: 1) security; 2) competitiveness enhancement; 3) human capital development and

strengthening; 4) social cohesion and equity; 5) eco-friendly development and growth; 6) public rebalancing and development (ibid.).

Figure 15: Thailand's vision under the 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037)

Courtesy to National Strategy Secretariat Office, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board



The strategy has received criticisms due to its rapid drafting under a military government. The rushed preparation process from planning to implementation in a single year (September 2017 to October 2018) as well as the lack of transparency and public inclusivity were also indicated (Laochokchaikul and Ratnatilaka Na Bhuket, 2024).

The 20-year National Strategy as a long-term national roadmap was launched during the period of 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021) as a top level national priority. From this first level policy with its six key foci, several second level plans were also generated, including 1) twenty-three Master Plans under National Strategy, 2) National Reform Plan (13 issues), and 3) National Economic and Social Development Plan. Following the first and second level plans, each government agency has had to generate its own action plan as a third level plan.

All ministries had to adjust their policy and action plan as third level plans. In the case of the Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, the Policies and Strategies to Foster Contemporary Arts and Culture, 2017-2021 (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2017a) had already been published before the new long-term plan appeared, so it had to re-arrange and adjust

their action plan to suit the 20-year National Strategy, the National Reform Plan and the 12TH NESDP. This has meant that the OCAC's Action Plan to Foster Contemporary Arts and Culture, 2020-2022 (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2020) delayed its launch until two years later in 2020.

Under the 20-year National Strategy (1st level plan), 23 master plans were generated thematically as a second level plan for government agencies to follow. Each ministry is assigned the responsibility to drive and act as a main host of delegated master plan depending on each ministry's specialty. The Cabinet Resolution on 3rd December 2019 appointed the Ministry of Culture as the main host for Issue no. 10: *Change in value and culture*, which made its focus on changing the value and culture and to generate any actions or projects to support the other issues' goals. The master plan's goals of this issue no. 10 (100001) are below.

Thai people have morality and good social value with more love and pride on Thainess. Thai people bring and apply the philosophy of sustainable economy in their way of life. Thai society is happy. Thailand receives higher acknowledgement from other countries (The Secretariat of the Cabinet, 2019).

The above goals explicitly use the phrase 'more love and pride on Thainess' as the key phrase in these goals of the Thai government after encouraging the use of King Rama IX's sustainable economy philosophy. This major goal of the first level policy reflects the Thai government's viewpoint in managing changes in Thai values and culture.

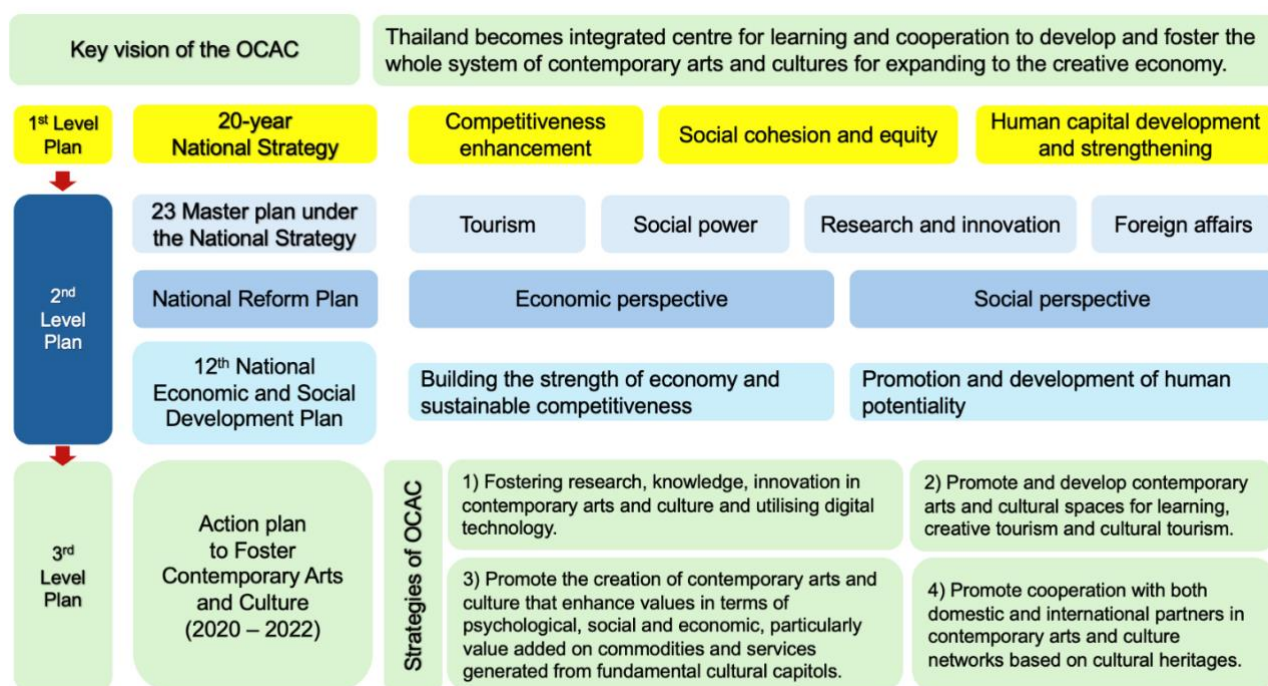
Furthermore, among the 23 issues in the national master plan, the Ministry of Culture considered that 21 key issues are related to the ministry's duties and missions (see Table 8). However, eight issues are those given most emphasis by the Ministry of Culture: (10) Change in values and culture; (2) Foreign Affair; (5) Tourism; (1) Security; (4) Industries and services for the future; (6) Smart, liveable areas and cities; (12) Learning development; and (16) Local economy development.

Table 8: Twenty-three Master Plans under the 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037)

23 Master Plans	
1. Security 2. Foreign affairs 3. Agriculture 4. Industries and services for the future 5. Tourism 6. Smart, liveable areas and cities 7. Infrastructure, logistics and digital system* 8. Smart entrepreneurs and SMEs 9. Special economic zones 10. Change in values and culture 11. Lifelong human development 12. Learning development	13. Thai people's health and well-being enhancement 14. Sport capability improvement 15. Social power 16. Local economy development 17. Equity and social protection 18. Sustainable growth 19. Integrated water management* 20. Public administration and government efficiency 21. Anti-corruption and misconduct 22. Laws and justice procedures 23. Research and innovation
* The issues were considered not related to the Ministry of Culture's duties and missions.	

When examining the relationship between the action plan to foster contemporary arts and culture (2020-2022) of the OCAC and the first and second level plans, the OCAC saw the linkage of the action plan to the top policies as illustrated in Figure 16 below.

*Figure 16: The relationship between the OCAC's action plan to foster contemporary arts and culture (2020-2022) and the first and second level plans
(Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2020, p. 7)*



The key vision of the OCAC is that ‘Thailand becomes integrated centre for learning and cooperation to develop and foster the whole system of contemporary arts and cultures for expanding to the creative economy’. To follow this key vision by integrating first and second level policies, the OCAC considered three main areas to focus on, including competitiveness enhancement, social cohesion and equity, and human capital development and strengthening. In the second level plans, four of the twenty-three issues in the master plan were in focus: tourism, social power, research and innovation, and foreign affairs, while two from 13 issues of economic and social perspectives were considered in the National Reform Plan. In addition, two strategies of the 12th NESDP were noted, namely, 1) strengthening the economy and sustainable competitiveness and 2) promoting and developing human potential.

Therefore, in the action plan to foster contemporary arts and culture (2020-2022), the OCAC generated organisation’s four actionable strategies (Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2020, p. 7) below.

1. Foster research, knowledge, innovation in contemporary arts and culture and utilising digital technology.
2. Promote and develop contemporary arts and cultural spaces for learning, creative tourism and cultural tourism.
3. Promote the creation of contemporary arts and culture that enhance values in terms of psychological, social and economic values, particularly those added to commodities and services generated from fundamental cultural capitals.
4. Promote cooperation with both domestic and international partners in contemporary arts and culture networks based on cultural heritages.

Each of these four actionable strategies of the OCAC to promote contemporary arts were controlled by the government's views on Thainess. In the 4th strategy, though it aimed to promote cooperation with both domestic and international networks, categories of contemporary arts were limited only to those that can be considered as *cultural heritage*. The 2nd and 3rd strategies emphasised promoting economic values. The second one stressed *creative and cultural tourism*, while the third pointed out the added value of arts and cultural product as representation of *collective psychology*. Therefore, these creative and cultural tourism or value-added arts and cultural products were implicitly controlled by government's ideology of Thainess. Only the first strategy left the word 'contemporary arts and culture' free from the control of the state's ideology. Yet even this may not be fully free from the state's ideology since this third level plan was generated under the first and second level plans. In other words, though it was not stated explicitly in the first strategy of the OCAC, it was controlled by the top policy of 20-year National Strategy that aims for 'love and pride on Thainess' (The Secretariat of the Cabinet, 2019).

From the OCAC's actionable policy, it is crucial to consider the budget allocations from the government during these three years of the plan. Table 9 below shows three years' budgets of the Ministry of Culture between 2020 and 2022.

Budgets for the Ministry of Culture consists of two types. The first type is allocated to six offices and three public organisations under its responsibility. The second type is for one of four revolving funds under the Ministry of Culture: 1) Fund for Buddhism Promotion and Dissemination on the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 80th Birthday Anniversary of Department of Religious Affairs, 2) Archive Promotion Fund of the Fine Arts Department, 3) Cultural Promotion Fund of Department of Cultural Promotion and 4) Contemporary Arts Promotion Fund of the OCAC. Overall, allocated budgets for the Ministry of Culture have decreased every year from 8,611,429,500 baht (£215,285,737⁴¹) in 2020 to 8,099,093,400 baht (£202,477,335) in 2021, 6% less than 2020, and then 7,100,054,000 baht (£177,501,350) in 2022 or 12% less than 2021 budget. Noticeably,

⁴¹ Following the average exchange rate during 2020-2022 at 40 Baht = £1

only the budget of the Moral Promotion Centre (Public Organisation) has significantly increased every year.

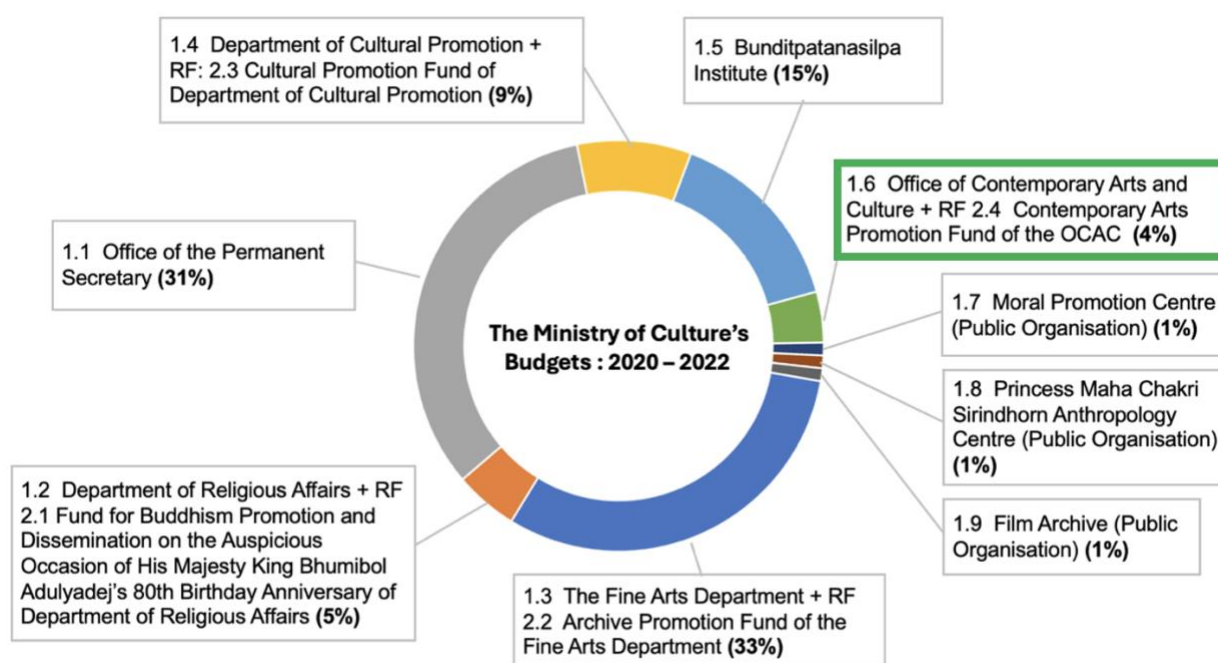
Table 9: Budgets of the Ministry of Culture during 2020-2022 (Budget Bureau, 2022)

Ministry of Culture	Fiscal year / Thai Baht (approx. British pound*)		
	2020	2021	2022
Total budget (1+2)	8,611,429,500 (£215,285,737)	8,099,093,400 (£202,477,335)	7,100,054,000 (£177,501,350)
1) Ministry's offices and Public Organisations	8,506,373,300 (£212,659,332)	7,962,888,500 (£199,072,212)	6,993,536,700 (£174,838,417)
1.1 Office of the Permanent Secretary	2,964,373,300 (£74,109,332)	2,332,045,100 (£58,301,127)	2,111,176,300 (£52,779,407)
1.2 Department of Religious Affairs	412,326,100 (£10,308,152)	399,126,000 (£9,978,150)	329,586,700 (£8,239,667)
1.3 The Fine Arts Department	2,541,636,400 (£63,540,910)	2,758,465,300 (£68,961,632)	2,532,695,100 (£63,317,377)
1.4 Department of Cultural Promotion	730,829,900 (£18,270,747)	645,677,300 (£16,141,932)	551,389,700 (£13,784,742)
1.5 Bunditpatanasilpa Institute	1,282,267,000 (£32,056,675)	1,302,181,200 (£32,554,530)	1,015,353,400 (£25,383,835)
1.6 Office of Contemporary Arts and Culture	259,693,800 (£6,492,345)	224,421,000 (£5,610,525)	187,213,500 (£4,680,337)
1.7 Moral Promotion Centre (Public Organisation)	65,123,500 (£1,628,087)	74,105,500 (£1,852,637)	88,243,000 (£2,206,075)
1.8 Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (Public Organisation)	108,543,900 (£2,713,597)	104,232,100 (£2,605,802)	95,354,500 (£2,383,862)
1.9 Film Archive (Public Organisation)	141,450,200 (£3,536,255)	122,635,000 (£3,065,875)	82,524,500 (£2,063,112)
2) Revolving Funds (RF)	105,056,200 (£2,626,405)	136,204,900 (£3,405,122)	106,517,300 (£2,662,932)
2.1 Fund for Buddhism Promotion and Dissemination on the Auspicious Occasion of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 80 th Birthday Anniversary of Department of Religious Affairs	22,779,000 (£569,475)	12,779,000 (£319,475)	9,223,200 (£230,580)
2.2 Archive Promotion Fund of the Fine Arts Department	20,774,200 (£519,355)	19,600,300 (£490,007)	14,930,200 (£373,255)
2.3 Cultural Promotion Fund of Department of Cultural Promotion	52,590,000 (£1,314,750)	95,119,800 (£2,377,995)	76,095,800 (£1,902,395)
2.4 Contemporary Arts Promotion Fund of the OCAC	8,913,000 (£222,825)	8,705,800 (£217,645)	6,268,100 (£156,702)

* Following the average exchange rate during 2020-2022 at 40 Baht = £1

The budget allocations to each office under the Ministry of Culture between 2020 and 2022 is shown in Figure 17 below. Surprisingly, allocation to the OCAC is divided into nine categories⁴² of contemporary arts, including revolving funds: the Contemporary Arts Promotion Fund (2.4) constitutes only 4% of the overall budget. If this study includes the Film Archive (Public Organisation) as a part of contemporary body, it means the overall government's budget for contemporary arts and culture sector was only 5%. This budget for the OCAC was lower than the budget of Department of Religious Affairs, including revolving fund (2.1) and the Moral Promotion Centre (Public Organisation), which was 6% in total.

Figure 17: Proportion of budgets allocated to each office under the Ministry of Culture between 2020 and 2022 fiscal years



The proportion of overall budgets in Figure 17 above shows that 95% of Ministry of Culture's budget goes to national arts and culture and religion, far outweighing the amount allocated to contemporary arts and culture. Unsurprisingly, when considering the key missions of the Ministry of Culture and key visions of each organisation in Table 10 below, this budget allocation reflects the Ministry's key missions.

The main missions and each organisation's visions were controlled by the first mission, which stresses the importance of three pillars of Thainess: nationhood, religion (Buddhism) and monarchy.

⁴² The OCAC is responsible for promoting 9 categories of contemporary arts: 1) Visual arts, 2) Performing arts, 3) Music, 4) Literature, 5) Architecture, 6) Interior design, 7) Graphic design, 8) Film and 9) Fashion design (The Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, 2004, p.19)

It implies that organisations under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture need to follow the policy that supports the government's ideology of Thainess.

Table 10: Key missions of the Ministry of Culture and key visions of each organisation between 2020-2022

Key missions of the Ministry of Culture between 2020-2022	
1. Pay respect to the nation, religion and monarchy and maintain religion arts and culture to be preserved, inherited and developed sustainably. 2. Promote development on cultural capital to add economic values. 3. Promote and develop cultural relations with foreign countries to present Thainess on the world's stage. 4. Build awareness, values and good way of life in Thai society. 5. Provide education, research, knowledge management and create innovation in religion, arts and culture. 6. Upgrade administration in mechanism, regulations, planning, strategy and laws about religion, arts and culture. (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022, p. 1)	
Ministry's offices and Public Organisations	Key visions of each organisation, 2020-2022
1.1 Office of the Permanent Secretary	To be high-capacity organisation in appointing policies, strategies and cultural administration in both domestic and international domains. To develop quality and working standard, including that in its affiliated bureaus.
1.2 Department of Religious Affairs	To support royal ceremony, royal merit making and preserve religious ceremonies. To patronise and protect religions and bring virtue and morality to Thai society.
1.3 The Fine Arts Department	To preserve and develop national heritage as a foundation for strong and stable social and economic development of the country.
1.4 Department of Cultural Promotion	To be the main organisation for sustainably promoting values of Thainess within 2022. To be the main organisation for cultural promotion that builds and strengthens social sustainability.
1.5 Buditpatanasilpa Institute	To be a leading national institution in training dance, music, composition, craftsmanship and fine arts. To produce qualified pundits with national educational standard and bring the institute to international level.
1.6 Office of Contemporary Arts and Culture	To be a leading organisation to propel cultural capital to sustainably add economic and social values.
1.7 Moral Promotion Centre (Public Organisation)	To promote and propel social networks with knowledge and innovation to virtue society.
1.8 Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre (Public Organisation)	To be the main organisation in anthropological knowledge and information management to enhance the understanding of diversity in mankind's cultures.
1.9 Film Archive (Public Organisation)	To be a national film archive of good standard and be accepted globally. To be a leading organisation in using films for building wisdom in Thai society. (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2022, p. 2)

Apart from the OCAC and the National Film Archive (Public Organisation), the other five offices and two public organisations seem to be able to efficiently respond with this state ideology, unlike the OCAC. For example, the Fine Arts Department (receiving 33% of the overall budget) clearly is seen to focus on traditional Thai arts and culture, and the Bunditpattanasilpa Institute (receiving 15% of the overall budget) is a state institute for training practitioners in traditional Thai performing arts, music, crafts and fine arts. Most graduates from this institute continue to work on behalf of the state as artists in the Fine Arts Department.

Chapter 5: Findings from in-depth interviews and focus groups

This chapter will focus on three key topics arising from the in-depth interviews and focus groups: 1) the significance of Thainess and contemporary performing arts; 2) funding difficulties and complications of Thainess; and 3) arguments on the pros and cons of international funding for Thai contemporary performing artists and their audiences.

5.1 Discussion on Thainess and contemporary performing arts

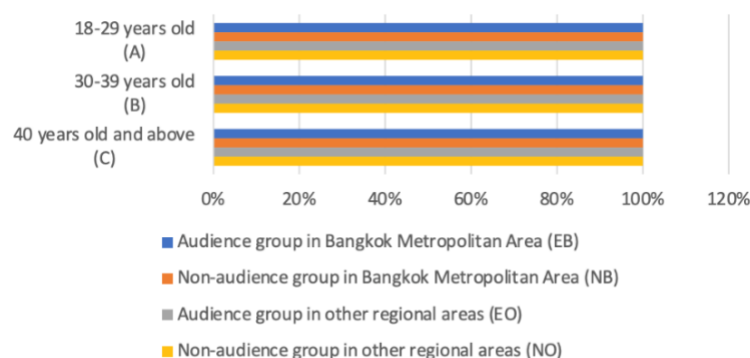
Discussions with representatives of all stakeholders in the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector identified no consensus view concerning the meaning of either Thainess or 'contemporary'. All informants saw both words as complex and controversial. This research groups opinions on Thainess and contemporary (performing arts) into three main perspectives or 'gazes': 1) that of the contemporary audience; 2) that of contemporary performing arts organisations and artists and 3) that of the state.

5.1.1 The contemporary audience's gaze on Thainess and contemporary performing arts

(A) Participants' demographics

As reported in the previous chapter, this study examined 60 participants whose age groups and experience of watching contemporary performances can be organised, as shown in the Figure 18 below. They fell into 3 groups by age: those 18-29 years old, 30-39 years old, and 40 years old and above. Within each age group, participants are classified into 4 sub-groups: 1) audience members in the Bangkok metropolitan area, 2) audience members in other regions, 3) non-audience members in the Bangkok metropolitan area, and 4) non-audience members in other regions. There were twelve focus groups, each with five participants.

Figure 18: Demographics of participants: sorted by age and experience of watching contemporary performances



The genders of informants are shown in Figure 19. Both groups have a similar proportion of genders.

Figure 19: Proportion of participants' gender between audience and non-audience groups

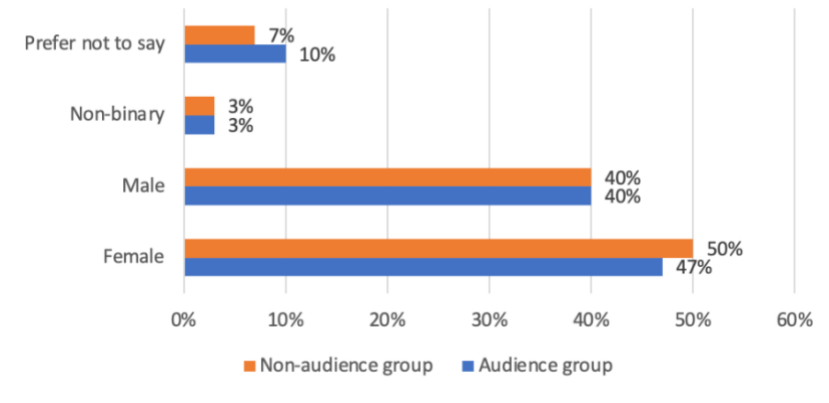


Figure 20: Residential areas of participants in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area (sorted by province)

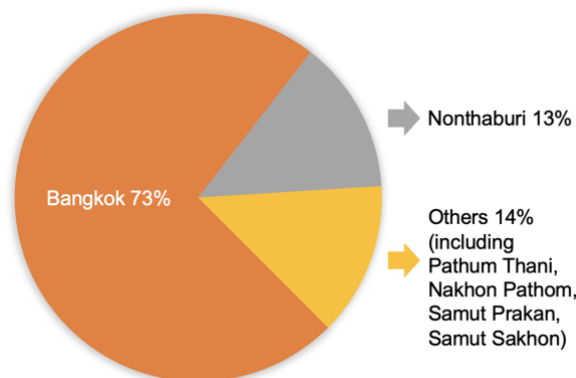
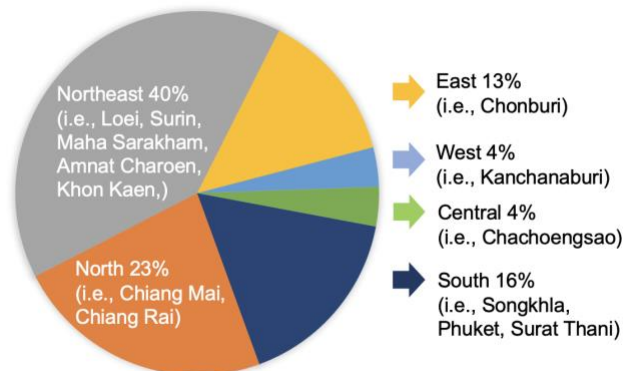


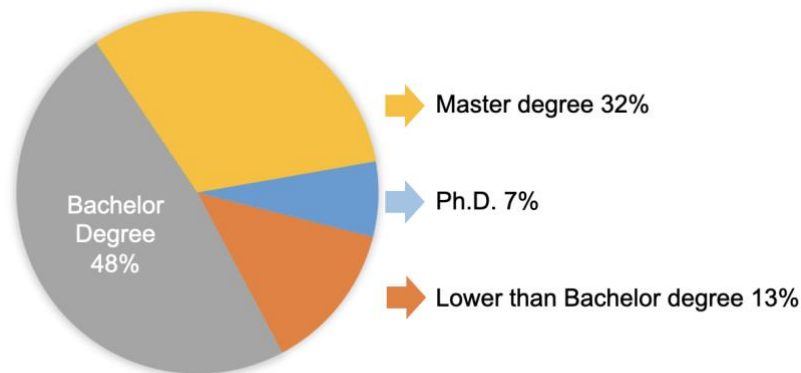
Figure 21: Residential areas of participants in other regions (sorted by regions)



This study divided the focus groups' informants into two clusters: 1) participants in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area, 2) participants in other regions. Of those participants from the Bangkok

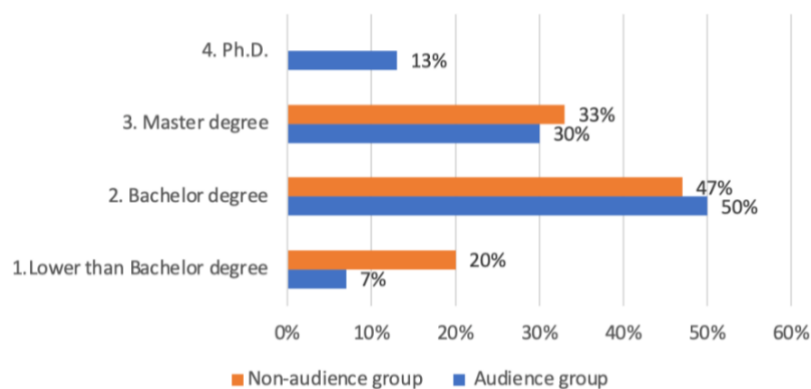
metropolitan area 73% live in Bangkok, 13% are from Nonthaburi province and 14% from other provinces in the metropolitan area, including those from Pathum Thani, Nakhon Pathom, Samut Prakan and Samut Sakhon. The proportions of informants from other regions are: 40% from the northeast, 23% from the north, 16% from the south, 13% from the east, 4% from the west and 4% from the central region. Provincial details of each region can be seen in Figure 21 above.

Figure 22: Educational backgrounds of all participants



In terms of educational backgrounds, almost half of the participants are bachelor's degree holders (48%) and over a quarter hold a master's degree (32%). In addition, while 13% have no university education, 7% hold Ph.D. degrees. When educational qualifications of audience and non-audience groups are compared (Figure 23), bachelor's degree and master's degree holders in both audience and non-audience groups have a similar percentage, while all Ph.D. participants are in the audience group. On the other hand, 20% of all non-audience members do not have a bachelor's degree, while 7% of the audience group is in this segment.

Figure 23: Educational backgrounds of audience and non-audience groups



The demographic information above illustrates the balance of sampled informants' qualifications from both audience and non-audience groups. The Figure 18 shows the equal proportion of numbers in each age group, while there is a variation of informant's genders. In terms of the informants'

residential areas, Figure 20 and Figure 21 show that this study included residents from all regions of the country. Both audience and non-audience groups have equal proportion of diverse education background. This demonstrates that the sampled informants for the focus groups are representative of the general public.

(B) Participants' gaze towards Thainess

From the discussions in 12 focus groups with 60 participants from the general public, overall opinions were analysed to reflect their attitudes towards Thainess. Data were divided into three types of attitudes and identified as type A, type B and type C.

The Type A attitude refers to those who recognised Thainess in its stereotypical traditional aspects. Generally, during the discussion they spontaneously shared their views that were rather influenced by standard government concepts or by a centralised view. The continuity of arts and culture from ancient time as indicated in Thai school textbooks or in government mass media formed a basis of understanding for this group of participants. A member of this group pointed out that 'It is a well-preserved tradition that has never been adjusted or adapted over time. Traditions nowadays are modified to attract a wider audience; thus, they are not like those of the past' (ANO-2). The glorious classical arts and culture (CNO-5), i.e., Thai classical pattern and painting, costume, Buddhist architecture, monarchic symbols, etc., are seen as valuable parts of the national heritage. These physical elements can be seen and recognised immediately as representing Thainess (CNB-2; BNB-2; BNB-3; ANO-1). Thai beliefs derived from local customs or Buddhism are also featured, and, as some argued, 'Thainess has relied on numerous beliefs and faiths since ancient time. We have to worship sacred things for a better life or better result in the matters that concern us' (AEO-4). This group appreciated Thainess based on traditional admiration, as a magnificent culture unlike any other countries'. They saw traditional or classical culture more as static forms of heritage than as evolving ones.

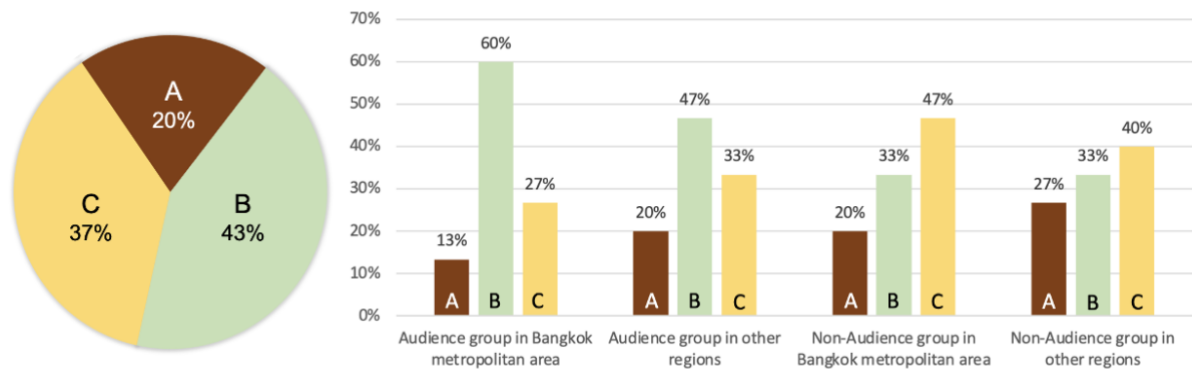
On the other hand, a type B attitude comes includes those who shared broad and critical viewpoints. Their quick reactions were curious and hinted at some disagreement with stereotypical notions of Thainess by questioning or thinking 'outside the box' from standard views. Most agreed it was difficult to identify Thainess, but they considered it as part of a dynamic cultural context embedded in Thai society rather than as a governmental political ideology. It was something which could be accepted, absorbed, adapted and adjusted from all cultures whether Khmer, Indian, Chinese, or the west (BNO-3), through a process of Thai-isation. Thainess, for them, is 'a melting pot that mixed many cultures in this geographic region' (AEB-5). It was marked by great diversity and dynamisms (BEB-5; CEB-4; ANO-3; ANB-4). Some also stressed uniqueness, namely that 'Thainess is something not available in other nations' (ANB-1). Some raised concerns about inclusiveness and argued that

'Thainess depends on the context of each region or which part of the country they are living in or have come from' (BNO-5). Another Muslim participant pointed out that 'I feel that I am not included in the mode of Thai standard culture as I am a Muslim. Who I am now cannot be defined as a part of Thai culture' (BEO-1). Moreover, many participants questioned the term rather than trying to define it, particularly in relation to some taboos which Thai people feel uncomfortable about discussing. A member from the non-audience group outside of Bangkok said that 'I cannot answer it. How do people in other religions feel? Thainess is not only Thai classical dance or Buddhism. Those local people might think differently. For those who may not belong to any religion, we shouldn't judge them, should we?' (BNO-5). These opinions reflect questions about the current policy of the Thai government, which automatically excludes and dominates other cultures that might not represent the country's three pillars.

Lastly, informants with a type C attitude saw Thainess as a mix of traditional and non-traditional elements. During discussions Type C participants' reactions normally involved more thinking time than those of type A and type B as they pondered stereotypical definitions of Thainess and tried to arrive at a compromise. This type of person was clearly concerned about tradition, whilst simultaneously questioning it. 'Local ways of life or their cultures is also part of Thai identity' (CNO-2). One informant from a non-Bangkok area reflected that 'this question on Thainess reminds me of the moments when my foreign friends came to Bangkok. I always took them to classical performances. But right now, when reconsidering it, why have I never taken them to some folk or local shows? This question keeps popping up in my mind' (BEO-3). Another non-Bangkok participant also pointed out that 'in the past, when considering performing arts, I appreciated most works from the central region. It must be classical *khon*, for example. I was not interested in any folk or local performances. I thought that they were not as refined or elegant as classical ones. But now folk or local culture is a valuable component in my life' (BEO-5). These reflections suggest that local cultures are often overshadowed by default grand traditional cultures, and Thainess is often a concept tied to a centralised culture. 'How foreigners define Thainess' (BNO-2) was mentioned as a kind of reverse identification from the Other's cultural perspective. Some thought that Thainess had been embedded in who they are, as a young non-audience member indicated that 'Thainess is a set of stories, traditions or customs that I have absorbed since I was born' (ANO-4). It includes the 'Thai smile, *wai* or Thai salutation, friendliness (CNB-5), politeness' (CNB-4) which are also commonly understood positive aspects of Thainess, as well as negative characteristics such as indiscipline, not following rules and taking everything easy (CNB-3).

The proportions of the sampled informants who fall into these three types of gaze towards Thainess can be seen as in Figure 24 below.

Figure 24: Attitude towards Thainess defined by each participant group



From all participants including both audience and non-audience groups (illustrated in the pie chart of Figure 24), it is clear that the majority of informants are in group B and C, while group A is a smallest cluster. Nonetheless, the bar chart demonstrating areas of residency and range of cultural experience reveals a dissimilar pattern of data between audience and non-audience clusters. For the audience group, both geographical areas share similar pattern. Most are Type B, especially audiences in the Bangkok Metropolitan area, followed by a Type C. By contrast, the non-audience group has more participants with a Type C attitude followed by a Type B. Surprisingly, Type A formed a minority of informants in all clusters, both audience and non-audience and in all residential areas. The analysis of Thai audiences' perception of Thainess as categorised in Types A, B and C above will be further discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.4.

(C) Participants' gaze (audience group) towards Thainess in contemporary performing arts

The audience group mostly shared their critical opinions about Thainess with regard to the contemporary performing arts. For them, it is crucial that Thainess is considered within the contemporary period of the present time, since contemporaneity 'focuses on the issues that derive from today's people. Contemporary work is a work whose creators, such as playwrights and directors, are alive in the current time and provide the content for current audiences' (CEO-4). As another young audience member stated 'Thainess is fluid through the changing of time. The world right now goes far beyond defining Thainess' (AEO-3). He added, 'Nowadays, we do not need to define the term, Thai or not Thai. The world has been changing, but we are still trying to define whether this is us or not. In the end, we still cannot answer who we are' (ibid.). These opinions reflect the basic condition of contemporaneity which is evolving through time which affects relationships between Thainess and contemporary performing arts in recent Thai society.

For the audience group, 'Who makes or creates it?' is a key consideration of Thainess when discussing the content of a performance. No matter what kind of forms or techniques artists use in presenting their stories or thoughts reflecting Thai context or society, those works created by Thai

creator or artist can be considered a Thai performance. As some of the audience pointed out, contemporary performance in Thai context or thought 'created by Thais for Thais is a Thai performance, regardless of the presentation techniques' (AEB-2). 'We always forgot the word "culture" and that Thailand is actually a country deriving everything from everywhere else. What we identify as Thai might come from India, for example. Thainess is a narrative (AEB-3). If a contemporary performance or its story is about Thailand or Thai-influenced and created or told by Thais, it is Thai, because artists who have grown up in Thailand should absorb some elements of or be influenced by Thainess (AEO-4). A veteran audience informant thoughtfully argued that

What's popping into my head is -- if artists are Thais and have grown up in Thai culture, their works should have some elements of Thainess in them. Their way of thinking should be blended with their upbringing. If they use that thinking process to interpret their works, I can define them as Thai works. Although they try to work in *Farang* style, it will not be like the work of *farangs* who have grown up in western culture (CEB-1).

A young audience member gave an example of the contemporary dance works of Jitti Chompee's 18 Monkeys Dance Company, arguing that 'although someone thinks that it's not Thai, it represents the thoughts of an artist who has grown up in Thailand, in my opinion' (AEO-3). However, 'there are many audiences who watched Thai contemporary performances and assess whether they were Thai or not. The question is: Was it not Thai because they did not feel the sense of Thainess in it, or because it did not employ some high form or any glorious traditional elements that they expected artists to do?' (AEO-1). Another young audience member claimed, reflecting on the myth of Thainess in many general Thais, that 'Thainess is unmeasurable and subjective. There are various perspectives and many ways to define Thainess. If Thai contemporary artists create a work to convey their views/ perception of Thainess, we should respect their thoughts' (ibid.). Nevertheless, this notion of 'who makes or creates it' applies not only to Thai-born artists but also to foreign artists. As an audience member argued, 'On the other hand, if foreigners create works inspired by Thai elements and those foreign artists say that those works are Thai, I will agree, as artists represent them' (AEO-4). This opinion echoes the subjective element of Thainess in the audience's thought, where the artwork needs to be contextualised, as one experienced audience member discussed a Thai adaptation of a recent western play: 'Thai artists, for instance, put on a Thai version of 'ART', a play by the French playwright Yasmina Reza. If they translate the script into Thai and adapt all situations in the play into the Thai context, we can clearly see Thainess in its contemporary forms' (CEB-2). Therefore, contextualisation is a key element in identifying Thainess.

Secondly, Thainess in contemporary performance goes beyond form and is embedded in the content or message that artists want to convey. 'Artists might use any presentation technique to communicate their messages' (CEO-4), and their 'messages are more important than form' (AEB-5). They have 'a right to experiment with diverse methods to create works or connect the arts to other

realms' (AEO-1). Form should be seen as a tool for artists to create their show, as another audience member pointed out:

For example, artists might use Stanislavski's techniques to tell the story of Thai women. How can we say that this performance is not Thai? I think western knowledge is just a form, but we shouldn't use the origin of those forms to include that the content should be concerned with a similar origin as the form. It's different. Western form is only a tool for artists to tell the story. 'How to define its DNA' is totally about its content, not a form or a technique (AEB-4).

The quotes above suggest that searching for the true cultural DNA of Thai contemporary performance is contentious, without a consensus, and as 'contemporaneity' itself is often considered a western (*Farang*) influence. One audience member argued that 'contemporary performance is a way to present what artists want to communicate, but the vocabularies used to define this term are based on modern words. Then ordinary people automatically understand it as a new thing, which might not be Thai' (BEB-4). It is 'usually stereotyped as having a western influence and not quite Thai' (CEB-2). These opinions echo the myth that people use the same vocabulary and have stereotypes for contemporary arts. Another audience member also pointed out that the limited choice of terms in the Thai language, especially in the arts-related lexicon, was constraining since the Thai language 'has a few Thai words to define terms for performing arts categories. So, when people consider it, there are only two opposite choices to define them, namely traditional and contemporary performances' (BEB-2). This binary thinking, with a pair of contrasting terms traditional (or old form) and contemporary (or new form) is a deep and unconscious way of thinking. A young audience from outside the Bangkok area argued that 'people always have an image of Thainess in their memory, the *khon* for instance. Although the memory represents a stagnant image of Thainess is an ancient representation, Thainess is actually alive and diverse. There are various elements, diverse cultures, and many different regions' (AEO-5). Thais might say that contemporary performing artists are trained in western theories, techniques or western scripts, so these western ideas influence the creative performance making process. Nonetheless, another young audience informant in the Bangkok area interestingly responded to this argument as follows:

It cannot be denied that the western sense or vibes appear in those works. So contemporary works are generally seen as a stereotype of western influence. But it will only be after some time when artists have worked consistently and explored many creative possibilities to make their own unique signature; they will not be stuck with western-ness. Contemporary performing arts can be anything, western or not, and no one cares (AEB-1).

It also seems that the boundary between Thai and western influence is gradually blurring over time, as a middle-aged audience indicated: 'The situation right now is that Thainess and western-ness have mixed and merged with each other to the extent that it's hard to distinguish between them' (CEO-4). When considering contemporary performances, 'we cannot distinguish how much western-

ness is in it, but there are some elements of Thainess that are still obvious, such as the language of communication and unique musical styles' (ibid.).

Furthermore, while the audience group's discussion on Thainess in contemporary performing arts normally emphasised the influence of *farang* or westernness, one audience member pointed out that Thai contemporary performances now go beyond any *farang* style, arguing that

I mean, Thailand takes in stuff from everywhere, from all kinds of global trends now. Even in the past, Siam borrowed from India, Khmer and China because those cultures were glorious, like the west was at the height of the colonial period. Right now, Thailand absorbs influence from Japan and Korea, which also adopted from the *farang* and then incorporated these elements into their own culture. So for Thai contemporary performances, it's easier to say that they do not quite represent Thainess than to try to identify them more precisely. The word 'Thainess' is self-contradictory (BEB-3).

Her opinion showed an interesting way of assessing since Thainess was based on absorbing elements that did not seem to be Thai instead of defining what Thainess is. However, evaluating Thainess through the content of the performance is complex and difficult to pinpoint, as sometimes Thainess fluidly transforms itself and involve in both content and form of performance as an audience member shared some thought-provoking opinion that

While we are discussing this topic, many questions burst into my head. If *lakhon nok* [outer court play] performs Romeo & Juliet, will it be considered Thai? I would consider it Thai, as its form is Thai. On the other hand, if there is a ballet of 'Phra Apai Manee', I also consider it as Thai, since its main content is absolutely Thai. In addition, if Pichet Klunchun, with his unique work of Thai contemporary dance style, creates a solo performance of a Streetcar Named Desire, I would consider it Thai, too (CEB-1).

This opinion wisely clarifies the fluidity and various conditions of Thainess in the contemporary performing arts. Thainess, in the first example, is a Thai form with western content while in the second one it is Thai content embedded in the western ballet form. The latter blends a western story and the thought of an individual Thai who created it. He goes on to point out another critical case:

One more example popping up now: I saw a drag show by a Thai performer, Amadiva. She told her story using *Farang* [English] songs, but the main content was about her life. She was born and raised in a Thai context, and her struggle as a drag person in this society. From childhood, her life, family and love all happened in a Thai context. In this case, there were no Thai forms, it was a drag show covering English songs. It seems that only the performer represents Thainess. However, her creative process included some Thai elements and the content itself; in this case, I would also consider it Thai (ibid.).

This example cleverly explains how Thainess exists in an explicit western form. In this case, both the content of the story and the artist herself represent Thainess, although the form of presentation

and song lyrics are in English. It shows how complex Thainess is in relation to contemporary performances.

Thirdly, instead of a polarisation between old forms and new influences, contemporaneity is seen as explaining or reflecting them both. An audience in the greater Bangkok area pointed out that 'contemporary arts or contemporaneity is not a matter of defining types of performing arts but rather as a means to clarify or explain both old and new forms. Contemporary performing arts emphasise the communication process or thinking process of today's artists, either in a new or traditional form' (BEB-5). He shared his opinion about an example of the Royal Khon performance nowadays: 'it's a contemporary work because its techniques and ways of communication are different from those of the ancient times' (ibid.). Another audience from outside Bangkok argued from a local viewpoint that 'contemporary work is not equal to western style. I think. If we actually consider it, local folk performances also have some similar components or techniques as in western theories. However, the western way of thinking helps them systematically organise their work more precisely' (BEO-5). One audience member from the same focus group also stated that even local folk performances of any region have elements of contemporaneity because those performances must adjust themselves to the present all time. They adjust and change their creations over time to serve their current audiences. Artists must do this to survive. 'I saw that some folk performances today employ western semiotics theories in their creations, so that their audiences can appreciate minimal narrative work which convey rich meanings. It focuses on certain issues rather than entertaining' (BEO-4). He also noticed that today's *mohlam* troupes also utilised some western theories in their shows. However, 'artists also need to find a balance in their performance presentation, as they must entertain their audiences who pay for the tickets as well' (ibid.). Another audience member raised a thoughtful argument:

I feel that when we talk about contemporaneity, it is rooted in western ideas. Most contemporary works seem to stimulate me, as an audience member, intellectually, but that doesn't mean that traditional works do not so as well. Due to its aim of encouraging thought-provoking or critical thinking, I think contemporary works often have these kinds of elements... From modern *mohlam* in the Isan region to folk performances, I think they all have contemporary components. The importance of western viewpoint is in analysing different modes. I have considered the difference between the western and eastern art appreciations, and I found that eastern performances consider the experience of 'rasa'⁴³ and reception, rather than intellectual thinking. That is, we appreciate 'rasa' before considering its issues (BEO-3).

⁴³ 'rasa' (Sanskrit: flavour, taste or essence) is an aesthetic flavour in Indian art appreciation, particularly in visual art, performing arts or literary works. It is a crucial component that can only be indicated but not articulated. 'Rasa' is an abstract sense that audience sentiments pervade during appreciating artistic work (Britannica, 2023).

This audience argued about the different impact of contemporary works representing westernness and Thai local performances. Contemporaneity, on the one hand, encourages a more intellectual part of perception and appreciation, while the latter invigorates the human sense of aesthetic flavour. These are dissimilar ways of seeing or appreciating performance with western and non-western gazes. Nonetheless, these differences now benefit each other, especially in local performing arts, as folk performing artists employ some techniques in creating a production to encourage their audiences to think and also be able to enjoy the aesthetic flavour at the same time. An audience also agreed that 'contemporary performing arts will work with today's audiences by questioning or encouraging them to think and critique. It has this character, while tradition has its conventions, customs, rules to follow, and even the story or content' (BEO-1). In his opinion, if artists include thought-provoking processes or elements, though they use traditional forms or conventions from any local culture, those works can be contemporary. Besides, an audience agreed that 'traditional performing arts clearly have moral judgements of right and wrong in their framework. While contemporary performing arts also have their own framework, they are more flexible and diverse than traditional works' (BEO-5). Furthermore, another audience raised the point of advantage of contemporaneity as it encourages liberation in terms of the people's expression. As he argued, 'the influence of western thoughts on contemporaneity allows the tiny issues of ordinary people to be communicated or told, in my opinion' (BEO-1).

Fourthly, contemporary performing arts are considered a universal piece of work. Some audiences 'interpret contemporaneity as a universal feeling or soul. If we consider it a universal soul, it has a collective feeling' (CEO-5). She also pointed out that the universal condition is far beyond the dialogue between modern and traditional forms, as permeating the general public's imagination (ibid.). Another member argued that artists are now 'developing ways to connect globally. Thai artists tell the story that can be understood by all nations and in all languages, not just us who understand it' (AEB-5).

Lastly, some audience members pointed out that first impression is a key in recognising Thainess. Therefore, elements of traditional form might need to be included for viewers to recognise them instantly when they look at those performances. As a member shared her thoughts on Thai contemporary performance, 'it should have some distinctive elements representing Thainess in a concrete way, for example, the performers' appearance. Sometimes it might not need to be a traditional Thai headpiece, but they're wearing dresses made from Thai fabric. If not, it cannot be considered Thai in my opinion' (CEB-5). A middle-aged audience member from a regional area emphasised her awareness of traditional performance, saying that '*khon* is our national performance. We have to accept that it's Thai identity. It's high art, representing delicacy in all processes of making it' (CEO-2). Another member agrees, '*khon* is a form that we do not need to explain much if we say

that it's a Thai performance. So, its form is instantly recognised as representing Thainess' (CEO-4). Another regional audience shared his recent experience watching a famous cultural show for tourists in Phuket province:

I saw Phuket Fantasea two months ago, and all stereotypical elements of Thainess were shown on stage, i.e., *khon*, elephants, demons and a Thai rural atmosphere with a running chicken flock. This is what the show promoter thinks is marketable, as tourists might want to see it. It might be difficult to market if they present a contemporary performance, as it must be for a specific group of audience (CEO-3).

The observation from this audience not only reflects what he decoded from the show but the observer himself also agreed that explicit traditional or folk-like elements have more potential for the market than contemporary performance does. Other members also argued, 'it should be what I can see at first sight and suddenly recognise some elements of Thainess in it. It might be something shiny like costumes' (CEB-3). 'I agree that recognition at first sight is important because it's clear enough and we judge only at this first appearance, i.e., *khon*, Thai dance, likay' (CEB-4). However, 'in terms of content, for some complex or implicit cases, it needs to be watched and digested before it can actually be considered Thai' (CEB-3). The time taken in considering the content might be a limitation for judging Thainess at first sight as an audience concluded that 'it needs to take more time to watch or reflect on. Then we can consider whether it is Thai or not' (CEB-4).

(D) Participants' gaze (non-audience group) towards Thainess in contemporary performing arts

For the non-audience group, as they do not have wider experience watching contemporary performances like the previous group, their views on Thainess in contemporary performing arts were expressed spontaneously in a comparative discussion of each type of performance. Here is an example of how they expressed their opinion.

Khon has the highest degree of Thainess, as it is an identity of Thainess that can be realised by sight. Anyway, it is a question of context and how they are considered from outsiders. For example, *mohlam* might be considered Thai from a foreigner perspective, but *mohlam* is an Isan performance; it might have some collective elements associated with Laos. From an outsider's perspective, *khon* is the most Thai, as its music and costumes can be recognised as Thai immediately when you see or hear them (BNO-1).

Non-audience members unconsciously classified or ranked each kind of performance by its degree of Thainess representation. The majority of them agreed that all forms of traditional royal *khon*, local contemporary *mohlam* from the Isan region or the north-eastern region, and contemporary physical theatre whose video clips were shown to them are Thai, but each type represents Thainess at various levels. As most of them argued, *khon* represents absolute Thainess with the highest degree (ANB-4, ANO-1, ANO-4, BNO-1, BNO-2, BNO-3, BNO-4, BNB-1, BNB-2, BNB-3, BNB-4, BNB-5,

CNB-2, CNB-4, CNO-1, CNO-2, CNO-3, CNO-4, CNO-5) because 'it can be recognised immediately when we see it' (BNB-1). *Khon* is 'definitely the most Thai in my eyes because of its costumes and elements that I am familiar with' (BNB-4). There might be 'only Thais who perform *khon*. Both of its expression and costumes may advance project Thainess' (ANB-4). Other non-audience members also pointed out that 'it is an identity of Thainess... its music and costumes can be readily realised as Thai by sight and sound' (BNO-1). '*Khon* has a long history in its story, presentation, etc.' (CNB-5). 'Though it has been adjusted over time, its posture, presentation and delicacy are still mostly old traditions' (CNO-1); *khon*'s 'elements represent good taste and high art form' (CNB-5). In addition, a member made a comparison that '*khon* and *mohlam* are both Thai but of different types: ancient Thai and local Thai' (CNB-1) and *khon* is emphasised, particularly among older audience groups, as having the highest degree of Thainess (ANO-4).

On the other hand, one of the non-audience members critically argued that '*khon* is an ancient performing art that is influenced by various countries. Ramakien is not authentic Thai either' (ANO-3) and indicated that *mohlam* has a higher degree of Thainess than *khon* (ibid.). Young members pointed out that all kinds of performances 'represent Thainess on different levels, depending on their audiences' (ANO-4), it depended on 'the audience's taste, curiosity or what they want from watching it' (ANB-5). For example, he said 'if I am a younger audience nowadays, my view on Thainess might not be *khon*, but contemporary performances or *mohlam* that I can enjoy watching and dancing with friends. It's an in-trend joyful activity that suits our lifestyle' (ibid.).

For *mohlam*, most non-audience members considered it to be local Thai 'as Thainess is diverse' (ANB-4), and it 'has a long history' (CNB-5), which represents a specific region of Isan, or the north-eastern region. 'Younger generations of audience may identify with *mohlam* more easily' (ANO-4). *Mohlam* nowadays 'seems modern through adjusting itself to the changing of time' (CNB-5). It 'contains more elements of contemporaneity' (ANB-2) 'integrating some universal elements such as musical instruments, dancers' costumes' (BNO-4) 'and in-trend scripts' (ANB-2). A member indicated that *mohlam* 'not only represents Thai-Isan, but its elements of presentation truly represent Thainess in the present time and the joyful character of Thais' (ANO-3).

On the contrary, there are some sceptical comments concerning the degree of Thainess in *mohlam* among non-audience members. These opinions can be categorised into two areas. Firstly, the nature of local or folk performance has a specific area of origin, and it represents shades of Thainess. Those areas do not represent the whole country. As a member argued, '*mohlam* has a niche market in the north-east, but *khon* represents the central region and the royal court' (CNO-5). Another non-audience member agreed that 'it's not universal. It seems to focus on some parts of the country, but it doesn't represent Thainess in an overall sense' (BNO-2). If they cannot hear its songs, they do not know exactly whether it is Thai (BNB-2, BNB-5). 'It might sing in our neighbouring countries'

languages' (BNB-2). The local dialect of Isan used in *mohlam*'s lyrics is also a point of discussion, as a member claimed, 'its Thainess is in northeastern style and people from other regions may not understand this dialect' (ANO-1). When comparing it to *khon*, they feel that *khon* represents Thainess as a whole, not tied to any regions like *mohlam* (BNO-2, CNO-5).

Secondly, the flexibility of local or folk performances in terms of adoption, adaptation and adjustment to any contemporary influences over time to serve their audiences might dilute the degree of Thainess of modern-day *mohlam* performances. A non-audience member observed that '*mohlam* is actually a local performance, but right now it integrates cabaret style, and their costumes are more like a carnival show than Thai *mohlam*. Its songs are Thai, but the outfits are not because what I saw in the past was not like this' (CNB-2). Some of them hesitated to consider Thainess in *mohlam*; one of them argued, 'I'm not quite sure, as right now it is adjusted to serve today's taste. It might be based on Thai culture, but now it changes a lot' (BNB-1). Another member supported this opinion that 'it is the north-eastern form of entertainment that has its own history, but right now its costumes are adapted to the modern style and do not keep the old appearance' (CNO-1).

The discussion of non-audience group above shows their attitude and way of considering the different shades of Thainess when comparing Thai traditional and local performances, with which they seem to be familiar. On the other hand, contemporary performances are rather controversial when considering their representation of Thainess. Some non-audience members pointed out that contemporary work had the lowest degree of Thainess in their opinion (BNB-4, CNO-5). Contemporary performing arts 'are not quite Thai. Its costumes, expressions and gestures do not represent any Thainess' (CNB-2). '*Mohlam* represents Thainess more than contemporary performance, which is not Thai at all' (CNO-5). 'I understood that it's contemporary, but it rather follows western style. I cannot see any Thai elements in it. I think, to represent Thainess, those works should retain the roots of Thai tradition in them' (CNO-5).

The Issue of western influence on contemporaneity rather affects the attitude of non-audience members when discussing Thainess in Thai contemporary works. One of them indicated, 'While contemporary performances might have another target, I think it has elements of Thainess but might mix with some western elements' (ANO-4). A member from the Bangkok Metropolitan Area also opined that 'contemporary performance looks very modern and international. I don't think that it's Thai without hearing its sound' (BNB-2). This implies that this member looks for some concrete elements, such as verbal communication (language), to help clarify its Thainess. Another non-audience participant pointed out that 'in the case of contemporary performances, although many artists try to include Thainess in them, it's just an appreciation in that specific context. Finally, contemporaneity is influenced by other countries, such as western countries, in my opinion' (BNO-1). Besides, contemporary performance is universal (BNO-4, BNO-2). Therefore, it has a lower

degree of Thainess because other countries also have those kinds of works or can stage performances like that (ANB-4, BNO-2) and 'it applies many new or recent elements' (ANB-1). It has universal languages, and everyone can understand them. 'Sometimes there is no verbal language, as artists use movement to communicate instead. It is more universal, by which I mean there is no race; it's neutral' (BNO-2).

Nevertheless, some non-audience shared their sensible thoughts on their consideration process. A member argued, 'Contemporary performance has some Thai-applied elements or vibes that I can sense' (BNB-5). Although 'it seems to have the least degree of Thainess, it depends on the story. If they use Thai performers but perform Farang's story, I feel that is not Thai. But if Thai actors perform in a Thai story and I can confirm after watching it, it's Thai but might be in a lower degree' (CNB-1). A young non-audience member believes that the originality of the story is able to project Thainess in it; he claimed, 'Contemporary performances also have elements of Thainess because some stories are written about our daily lives. However, they seem to derive from western countries, so they are considered to have a lower degree of Thainess' (ANO-3).

From the non-audience group's viewpoint, traditional performance *khon* contains the highest degree of Thainess as it represents the central Thai culture and the royal court traditions. Most believed that central Thai culture identifies the collective culture of the whole country. In addition, its long history as a Thai heritage is also part of their beliefs. *Mohlam* is classified as Thai local or folk performance as it is a regional culture, specifically in the Isan region and uses its own Isan dialects in performance. Non-audience members from other regions claimed that it did not represent their identities as they were not from Isan and could not understand Isan dialects. Furthermore, the flexibility of *mohlam* to serve its contemporary audience's tastes over time was an issue because its outer influence, i.e., modern western and foreign cultures, in the performance creation diluted its essence of Thainess. *Mohlam*, therefore, was believed to have a lower degree of Thainess than *khon*. They saw contemporary performances as representing the lowest degree of Thainess. The myth of western influence on Thai modernism or contemporaneity seems to play an important role in non-audience members' gazes.

Nonetheless, the next section will clarify how these gazes on Thainess affect the decision to attend performing arts events for both audience and non-audience groups.

(E) The reason to attend performing arts events and how Thainess concepts influence their decisions.

Following the discussion on Thainess and contemporary performing arts above, this section provides findings on the motivation to participate in performing arts events and how the notion of Thainess affects these decisions.

With regard to reasons to attend for both audience and non-audience groups as shown in Figure 25 below, half (49%) stated that their interest or curiosity in those performances was a key motivation for attendance. If they were interested in those events, they would search for more information on those works before deciding to attend. This motivation was linked to the second-highest reason (18%); attractive PR or advertisement of those events played a crucial role in catching their attention and prompting their next step of action, namely making a booking or pending their decision and waiting for some review of those works if they were uncertain about the production quality or if it might not fit their own taste.

Figure 25: Reasons to attend performing arts events

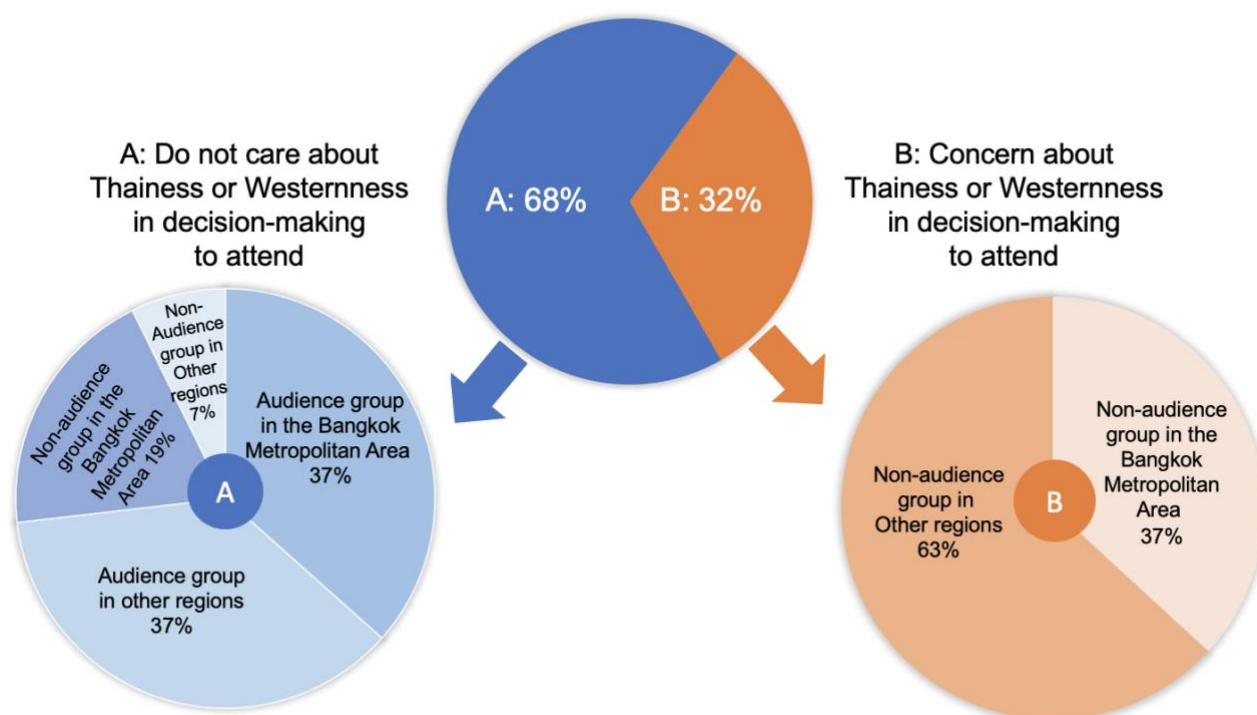


8% of them will attend on a special occasion or if they want a special experience, such as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. This once-in-a-lifetime experience can be considered in two aspects: firstly, the experience that they have never had and want to try once. Some members of the non-audience group said that if they could choose to attend any kind of performance, they would choose contemporary performance as they had never watched it before and wanted to try it once (BNO-5, CNO-4). Secondly, in case of a rare production or performance, if they did not watch it now, they might not have had another chance to watch it (AEB-5).

While 8% said that it depended on their convenience, i.e., having free time, money, etc., 5% of members in the audience group confirmed that they enjoyed watching every kind of work and tried to attend as much as they could. On the other hand, 5% of the informants, mainly from non-audience groups, preferred a grand or extravaganza show with special attractive techniques such as lighting, sound, or multi-media. The bottom three reasons are artist or company reputation (3%), a chance to hang out with friends (2%), and the fact that 2% of members would attend the event when they wanted to seek out new inspiration.

Above are their general opinions in terms of their decision to attend any performing arts events. From the discussions with all informants, from both audience and non-audience groups, regarding the influence of Thainess in their decision to attend the event, the majority (68%) agreed that they did not care about Thainess in making a decision to attend a performance. The other 32% said that the idea of Thainess had an influence on some aspects of their decision to attend traditional events (Please see Figure 26 below).

Figure 26: Opinions on the influence of Thainess in the decision to attend performing arts events



Interestingly, the informants who took into account Thainess in performing arts events were exclusively from the non-audience group; 63% of those from the Bangkok Metropolitan Area and 37% were in other regions. This group agreed that they would like to support traditional performance, i.e., royal *khon* (ANO-1, ANO-3, ANO-4, ANO-5, BNO-1, BNO-2, BNO-3, BNO-4, BNO-5, CNB-2, CNB-1, CNB-5, CNB-3) and that going to watch it helped to support it (CNB-4). In addition, its largescale production with special techniques increased their desire to watch it (CNB-1). One said that 'If I have free time, I should give myself a chance to watch *khon* as a once-in-a-lifetime experience' (ANO-4). Another non-audience member confirmed that 'I will definitely go to watch it if they have a touring production in my area. On top of the show ticket, there are other costs if I have to go to watch in Bangkok' (ANO-3). Moreover, a member concluded that 'I think most Thai people would like to attend. It feels like we need to protect our traditions and pass them on to the next generation' (BNO-2). She also mentioned that if she had a chance, she wanted to go and see it (ibid.).

On the contrary, the decision to attend regardless of the consideration of Thainess, comes from all groups of audience members, both in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area (37%) and in other regions (37%), including 17% of non-audience respondents in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area and 7% of non-audience members in other regions. For this group, no matter what kind of performance it is, if its production is interesting, either in terms of content or presentation, they will attend. A young audience member argued, 'If artists employ any western techniques that I haven't seen in those traditional works, though their contents try to present Thainess, I think it is interesting. I will choose these kinds of works over the traditional ones which I've often seen before' (AEB-2). 'If those works are extremely interesting, whether they are Thai or not Thai, I will go to watch them' (CEB-3).

However, another young audience member argued that a big Thai promotion of the traditional arts by the government made her less likely to see it. As she pointed out,

Performances that I chose to watch right now are works that do not overtly promote Thainess. If those works try to persuade me to go to enjoy any gloriousness of Thainess, I will not go to watch it because I feel that the word 'Thainess' has some negative sense. It seems like the show producer attempts to convey some attitude to the audience, particularly traditional performances that the audience are always encouraged to watch as part of the preservation of Thai heritage. Besides, I can imagine that those traditional performances must contain some patriotic content, and I do not want to be exposed to this kind of content (AEB-1).

This opinion reflects some distinctive actions of the Thai state. In Thailand, when the government promotes its national arts and cultural events, some cliché PR captions are always seen or heard in terms of promoting and encouraging Thai people to support Thainess, as if it needs preservation and protection. Furthermore, it is a message of 'Thai pride'. Most Thais admire and are familiar with this kind of patriotic mass marketing by the state. However, it also creates a bias in some populations as a senior audience member argued,

I would absolutely not go to watch it, if I heard the phrase asking for support for Thainess. I dislike those kinds of marketing captions in promoting works. Once I hear it, I'm automatically biased against that works. However, in general, 'Thai pride' can be a powerful notion for catching public attention, though they do not exactly know what Thainess is (CEB-4).

While another young audience member pointed out that if she wanted to attend, she would attend, even if it was a traditional performance like the *khon* performance. She also confirmed that patriotic marketing captions did not influence her decision to attend. On the other hand, these PR captions generated a negative response in her, as she did not believe them. Therefore, she would be more biased against those captions if she had to decide to attend (AEO-3). Besides, some senior audiences agreed that they never worried if those traditional works were unable to maintain their

market. It was all about content, in their opinion. If its content sounded interesting, they would definitely watch it (CEB-1, CEB-5).

From the viewpoint of non-audience members, one of them argued that 'to meet each other halfway is important' for traditional arts, as its convention is normally strict, untouchable, and there are many rules or taboos. She argued that if traditional works needed to reach a new audience, they needed to be more flexible, which might mean a reduction or an increase in some elements. It could not be denied that *khon* performances should exist as Thai performances (ANB-4). This opinion reflects the stagnation of traditional arts from the state's perspective.

In addition, a non-audience member focused more on the execution of the production than the typical elements of Thainess, as a young member indicated that if he was familiar with its story, he would not want to watch it. However, if the production creator created something new, such as adapting the story or using a new way of presenting it, it would be more appealing for him (ANB-1). Another informant said that 'to support Thainess, we can do it in many ways, not just go to watch it. If I want to watch it, I will make my own decision' (BNB-5). He also pointed out that the patriotic captions not only dissuaded him, but they also made him feel like he was forced to attend. (ibid.).

5.1.2 Perspective from contemporary performing arts organisations, artists and non-governmental stakeholders (Creators' gaze)

The opinions of contemporary performing arts organisations and artists are quite broad and critical on the issue of Thainess and its relationship to contemporary Thai performing arts. Their definitions of Thainess can be synthesised as follows.

Thainess is a dynamic relational concept, and that renders the notion being 100% authentically Thai as analytically doubtful (IDI-01). 'We do not know what Thainess actually is. Thainess is a mixture of various cultures in Thai geography. The amazing point of Thainess is its capability of mixing everything' (ibid.). It is broad and open. 'It is the capability to accept everything, then adjust or adapt it to serve the preferences, tastes, the ways of life and thoughts of the Thai people. It is not a polarisation between Thai perspectives and the west, as Thainess is the acceptance of all things and then adapting or experimenting with them until they become Thai. It's impossible to say what authentic Thai is' (IDI-08). Adaptability, flexibility, diversity and openness are distinctive characteristics of Thainess.

Everything that was made by Thais echoes Thainess in every dimension (IDI-07). Everything that emerged in Thailand, whether geographically or from diaspora groups with a set of thoughts with Thai cultural references, is Thai (IDI-13). Regardless of the sources (Thai or foreign sources) of

knowledge, some perspectives of Thainess, such as having Thai cultural reference, still persist in it (IDI-02). Thainess is part of being human. It is all about life, communication, consumption, living, sleeping, and having conversations with each other. (IDI-10). Both tangible and intangible substances created in this geography or by artists who are raised in a Thai cultural context will project a sense of Thainess in every aspect.

It has unique qualities when compared to other nations. Tradition is a part of Thainess, but some currently popular social issues, the Thai sense of humour, and social media consumption behaviour also represent Thainess (IDI-12). There is a set of stereotypes that people always perceive about Thainess: respecting seniority, preservation of tradition, following precedents, obedience, compassion, merit-making (IDI-05). 'Growing up in this country, I have noticed that the definition of Thainess rather relies on the image of traditional culture. On the other hand, Thainess now goes beyond that definition. However, I've often heard comments such as, we seem to be more *Farang* (western-like), and we seem to think like westerners. I think these kinds of notions lead me to an awareness that we've had infinite global influences' (IDI-12). Uniqueness is a key to identification; not only traditional elements but also contemporary vibes and appearances should be included in this uniqueness. However, the view of western or foreign influences as threats to Thainess remains part of a wider public perception.

When the notion of the contemporary performing arts was introduced into the discussion, most agreed that Thainess had to observe two criteria: form and content. 'Form, certainly, can be easily seen, but contemporary performing arts works are usually based on contents, as form can be changed over time' (IDI-01). It is today's narrative. Contemporary performance is not about forms because nowadays there are diverse forms, but what makes us feel contemporary is the conversation of and with the present. Thought and reflection, from any perspective, are an effect of what is happening in today's society (IDI-03). It is a creation based on the tradition in which artists have been trained. Certainly, western ideology is also employed, but it has contemporary aesthetics that reflect Thai life, Thai society nowadays, or the Thai contents (IDI-02). The works of B-Floor Theatre, for example, are usually presented in a western style but its contents strongly convey Thai social issues. So, when creators or makers are Thai, their creations also represent Thainess in some way. Namely, a performance that contains just a piece of thought based on Thai culture is also Thai (IDI-13).

The complex nuances of the word 'contemporary' generates ambiguity for public understanding. One young artist argued that 'I think it is used to explain something we do not know how to explain. So, we will use the word contemporary to identify it. For example, I don't know what kind of performance I'm making. Then I use the word contemporary to describe it' (IDI-04). Another respected artist agreed that the notion of contemporary in Thai society is vague, arguing, 'if someone creates

anything that is not a tradition, they will call it all contemporary work because it's a movement. Honestly, people do not know what modern work is or what contemporary work is, but they refer to the image of classical works in their heads. Then, when they see any work that does not wear classical dress or sing traditional rhymes, they will assume that the different forms are contemporary' (IDI-10). A representative from a performing arts promoting company argued on this point from its marketing viewpoint that, 'the easiest way is for people to consider contemporaneity not a tradition, not *khon*, not classical dance. From a media company's perspective, traditional audiences belong to different target groups for contemporary performing arts. Our team thinks that we need to define it precisely, so we separate traditional works as they have different target groups' (IDI-12). This is a practical point of view based on real experience in marketing.

Nonetheless, from artists' viewpoints, contemporary performing art is not only non-traditional works or newly created works. It consists of various genres as a range of art forms and tools that artists may use for communication. How those performances function in the present time is a significant issue to consider to relate them to contemporaneity. 'Contemporary is what is happening now. It can be things that are developed from the past or something new or derived from foreign influences. However, in the past it was also influenced by foreign countries. No part of Thai history has never derived influences from other nations. Thailand has never closed its borders. Therefore, contemporaneity and tradition are developed side by side. It is difficult to separate them' (IDI-08). Some of them noticed that in government or academic documents the definition of contemporary performing arts, in general, 'can be divided into two types: First, contemporary performing arts must be a combination of old and new. It seems like there is an old form mixing with a new form, or a Thai form blending with *Farang* form (western form). Secondly, it is an interpretation of old stories in a new way or a reinterpretation of traditional dramas' (ibid.). A representative from a foundation also added that 'If we consider art as an expression of people's thought, vision and perspective, today's space is changing all the time. Thought is dynamic; there is acceptance, discussion and moving fast forward. If art works, either local works or foreign-influenced works staged in Bangkok, can function with the current time, they are contemporary' (IDI-13).

Some contemporary works may reimagine, apply or adapt traditional forms, too. Traditional performances produced now are also included here. 'Classical works nowadays employ or apply new ideas to develop their creation as well. I think these are contemporary performing arts works' (IDI-02). Some of them agreed that classical works such as the Royal *Khon* Performance⁴⁴ now is also a contemporary work (IDI-05; IDI-07; IDI-10) 'because it does not perform in a traditional way.

⁴⁴ The Royal *Khon* Performance has been an annual event since 2007, supported by the SUPPORT Foundation of Her Majesty Queen Mother Sirikit.

Its objective and principle are contemporary. I mean, contemporary is not a form but rather about its objective and principle. When its function serves the present time, it becomes contemporary immediately, whatever the forms are' (IDI-10).

In addition, a highly respected contemporary dancer shared his principles on contemporary works, arguing that there should be five criteria (as shown in the table below).

Table 11: Criteria for considering contemporary work

Five elements of Contemporary Performing Arts (IDI-10)				
1 Artist's signature / unique style / focused issues	2 Represent the present time and current context.	3 Represent and encourage equality / equity.	4 Create something new.	5 Go beyond today and prepare the audience for tomorrow.

The dancer elaborated on his five elements as follows. Firstly, the creators' or artists' signatures must be clearly visible in the work. Artists should have consistency in the issues they want to convey, such as political subject or feminism. And they should have their own distinctive styles. Awareness of current time is the second principle. Presentation or stories employed to communicate the messages must be relevant to the moment. Nowadays, the society is being more complex and fragmented, due to the changing technological structure and influence of globalisation. Thirdly, contemporary performing arts must advocate for equality in all aspects. It can be a medium to promote democracy. According to the classical ideals of the traditional performing arts, dancers or performers must have attractive appearance while contemporary works do not need to embody these stereotypes; everyone can be a performer. Disabled people, overweight girls/boys or street vendors can perform on stage if they have a story or issue to express. Therefore, the stage needs to encourage equality in society. Fourth, in the creative process, artists need to experiment in order to create a new form, namely a new form of dance movement, presentation, storytelling technique or materials. As the message is about the present time, which differs from the past, the old form or old material should not be used. Lastly, contemporary works must think forward and prepare the audience for tomorrow. This is the key reason why people need to appreciate art, because contemporary arts will hint at the future (ibid.). These five principles illustrate his company's vision and mission in practicing, as well as his dignity as an artist. Moreover, they also mirror the ideology of contemporary artists and how artists can contribute their creative efforts to advocate a better society. He indicated that

It can be clearly seen that contemporary arts function in a different way from traditional arts. Traditional arts generate the pride of the past and place emphasis only on issues

of the nation, religion and monarchy to build a sense of pride in who we were in the past. It encourages the pride of the nation and is utilised to form unity, so on my third reason above, it rejects tradition as traditional works do not promote equality. Traditional works do not tell the stories of ordinary people. It presents the story of the lord of Buddha, the king, a great hero, but does not convey the story of the millions of soldiers who died in wars. It shows that only the king or one hero wins the wars (ibid.).

Furthermore, a veteran contemporary theatre critic pointed out from policy and practice perspective that 'there is a problem with the word Thailand, as there is an authority in charge of it, namely the OCAC. So, people will not see the links between contemporaneity and tradition. Contemporaneity is divided' (IDI-08). In the past, new or contemporary arts in Thailand received little support from the state. Although the OCAC was established, from his viewpoint, it created a complication for the government. 'When a new office was set up, instead of developing what was available and expanding it to include everything in one stop, it made things more confusing' (ibid.). Not only has the new office generated some confusion in its operations, but the OCAC's duties overlap with other offices in the Ministry of Culture. For him 'the point is that when its offices are separated, it creates an overlapping scope of work. For example, the OCAC encourages fashion designers to design modern outfits from Thai fabrics, but this is similar to the job of the Department of Cultural Promotion, the Ministry of Culture as well. It is overlapping' (ibid.). The above opinions from artists and other stakeholders in the Thai contemporary performing arts sector will be followed in the next section by the notion of Thainess and contemporaneity from the state perspective.

5.1.3 Perspective from government authorities

A Representative from the OCAC, Ministry of Culture, observed that 'Thainess, in its traditional meaning, is Thainess that has Thai roots, namely tangible objects such as architecture, language, costume, etc. The other meaning is contemporary Thai, which is Thainess in a global situation. It can be, for example, a new performance created by Thais. If we consider it through the lens of intellectual property, it's a Thai creation in the global context driven by either traditional Thai or contemporary Thai' (IDI-09). Besides, he considered the term contemporary arts to refer to recently developed works that may reflect the pattern of living and also need understanding and interpretation. He argued that 'I classify them into two types: new creations of works that happen in the current time and reflect the interpretation of artists on the way of life, social changes and so on; and secondly, works that are developed or re-created from tradition' (ibid.).

In addition, the Creative Economy Agency's (CEA) representative similarly pointed out that 'It is a universal work of arts, as universal means accessible. It either develops from tradition or is a new arts creation based on new contexts. It includes both western and non-western-influenced styles. Contemporary means it can reach everyone. It can be any work created by Thais, i.e., new creations or developments from tradition can communicate with today's audiences' (IDI-06). The

representative from the CEA clarified his viewpoint that the CEA did not care much about Thainess or polarisation of western/foreign styles: 'Certainly, when talking about works that developed from tradition, this is the mission of the CEA. But we need to remind ourselves that there are groups of new creations as well and we must not forget these groups. We need to promote these new works because they are also important' (ibid.). This is a progressive stance on contemporary works from the government authority's point of view. But the main objective of the CEA is to encourage economic growth or commercial success, which should be different from the mission of the OCAC.

On the other hand, a representative from the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department, Ministry of Culture, argued that 'there are Thainess from the government's viewpoint and the other kinds of Thainess. I think Thainess actually is a capability to compound or mix. Unfortunately, we are losing this aspect of Thainess as the government, academic staff, conservatives, etc., usually claim that this element is not Thai' (IDI-14). The key mission of the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department, is to 'preserve, inherit and disseminate Thai traditional arts and culture' (Office of Performing Arts, 2023). His notion of Thainess is quite critical. He also hinted that Thainess is more controversial even among the state's offices, as he pointed out:

Some people from the Ministry of Culture criticise that we are quite out of date and not adapting. However, seriously, we adapt a lot, but traditional audiences do not know as it's naturally merged in our execution. We need to serve audiences' tastes and play with their emotions... Audiences play an important role in our performance creation because if we cannot attract their attention for the whole 3 hours of performance, we will be in trouble. We are also at risk as well; conservative academic staffs view us as non-authentic. They claim that if they use some ancient text or convention to evaluate our production, they can accuse us of distorting the old convention. On the other hand, when some offices implement policy from the top that prefers us to modernise, but our performance's appearance has not changed as much as the *farang way*, they always think that we are primitive (IDI-14).

Two salient points are worth discussing: first, the role of audiences is important in traditional performance creation, and artists are usually aware of how to attract them; second, the attitude of being a modern Thai relies on integrating some western elements. A representative from the Office of Performing Arts explained that the *farang way* from an authority's point of view was to combine some lighting and sound techniques or digital media in the presentation of traditional forms, but he also noted that this needs bigger budgets. This seems to be a quandary for the Office of Performing Arts in terms of relating to 'contemporary' times, but he may not need to care much about those comments as the OCAC's representative stated clearly that 'in terms of the state, there are two aspects. Firstly, on behalf of the government, traditional protection is a concern; it is a preservative dimension. The second aspect is new creation and development through change' (IDI-09). The Office of Performing Arts can meet the first objective of preservation, but achieving new creations and development are more of a challenge for the OCAC, as the OCAC's representative claimed, 'we

have not always emphasised tradition, but the OCAC has opened the door for applied Thai concepts to be approached from many perspectives, not only in the performing arts. If we look at all the work of the Ministry of Culture in the last 20 years, the situation has gradually changed a in positive way' (ibid.).

The OCAC is a state agency which conditions its policies and their implementation, whatever its positive attitude. The OCAC representative argued that 'we are more open-minded now, but we need to work within the framework of Thai social values. Therefore, the OCAC is unable to allow for 100% freedom in artistic creation as we must rely on the three pillars of the country, which are nation, religion and monarchy' (IDI-09). This shows how artists' freedom of speech may be limited, as censorship is based on the duty of protecting Thainess applies to art work, too. He also emphasised that 'some cases are prohibited by law, some cases violate social values. You can have creativity, but it must not affect public feelings. For example, we cannot make any comments or do anything related to the monarchy because we all love and respect [the royal family] and are loyal to them' (ibid.). This illustrates the standpoint of the OCAC, an authority in charge of promoting contemporary arts and culture and respecting the country's three pillars which are necessary in providing support to contemporary arts.

Regarding the role of the OCAC in supporting contemporary performing arts, there are many debates among other stakeholders in the Thai arts and cultural system. Government attitudes towards protecting the country's three pillars is a controversial issue from artist stakeholders' views. One internationally renowned artist related his struggle early on in his professional artist career:

The government accused us of destroying tradition. In our first 10 years, state officers rejected us and tried to attack us because, at that time, no one was doing what we did. It was new and it truly challenged us. But now, our work has been recognised by the government as a wonderful work of Thai contemporary arts. The reason they changed their attitude towards us was because, firstly, I think Thai people forget easily; they are not too serious and we received international awards and global recognition. Secondly, they knew that we have grown in terms of finances and have our own space, so they do not bother us (IDI-10).

The opinion above implies that Thai artists need to receive international or public recognition and also to survive financially on their own merits before they are recognised or accepted by the state. Moreover, a professional critic shared his view of government work to promote arts and culture, comparing it to government offices with larger budgets to focus on preservation. 'The point is that these budgets are for preserving traditional culture, and we knew that our tradition was not authentic Thai either. So, it might be politically driven' (IDI-08). He gives the example that the latest annual event of the royal *khon* performance had finished its last performance on 5th December 2022. On the same day, a *khon* film *Hanuman: White Monkey* (2022) was launched in cinemas all over the

country with affordable tickets. This *khon* film project received funding support from Thai Media Fund and 'It was a propaganda to imbue loyalty to the monarchy. Hanuman is also the name of a special force under the Crime Suppression Division. The message is that Hanuman is loyal to King Rama (in the Ramayana). The government has to invest in a kind of projection; therefore, the preservation of some traditional performing arts is the way to enhance loyalty to the monarchy' (IDI-08). Though this *khon* film was supported by the Thai Media Fund, not the OCAC, it echoes the Thai government authorities' political ideology to maintain the stability of the country's three pillars, which is the state's notion of Thainess.

Furthermore, a representative from a performing arts foundation shared his positive view on the OCAC's work since he must contact them often. He indicated

The Ministry of Culture or the OCAC have quite a clear definition in their set of thoughts on Thainess. They have keywords such as gratitude, patriotism, morality, etc. in their beliefs. Nonetheless, it does not mean that they do not know about the other views, but they prefer to encourage those visions. Hence, the government usually goes in that direction. It is a challenge to us. There is both self-censorship and direct censorship when we touch on some issues that differ from this set of ideologies (on Thainess, for instance) encouraged by the government (IDI-13).

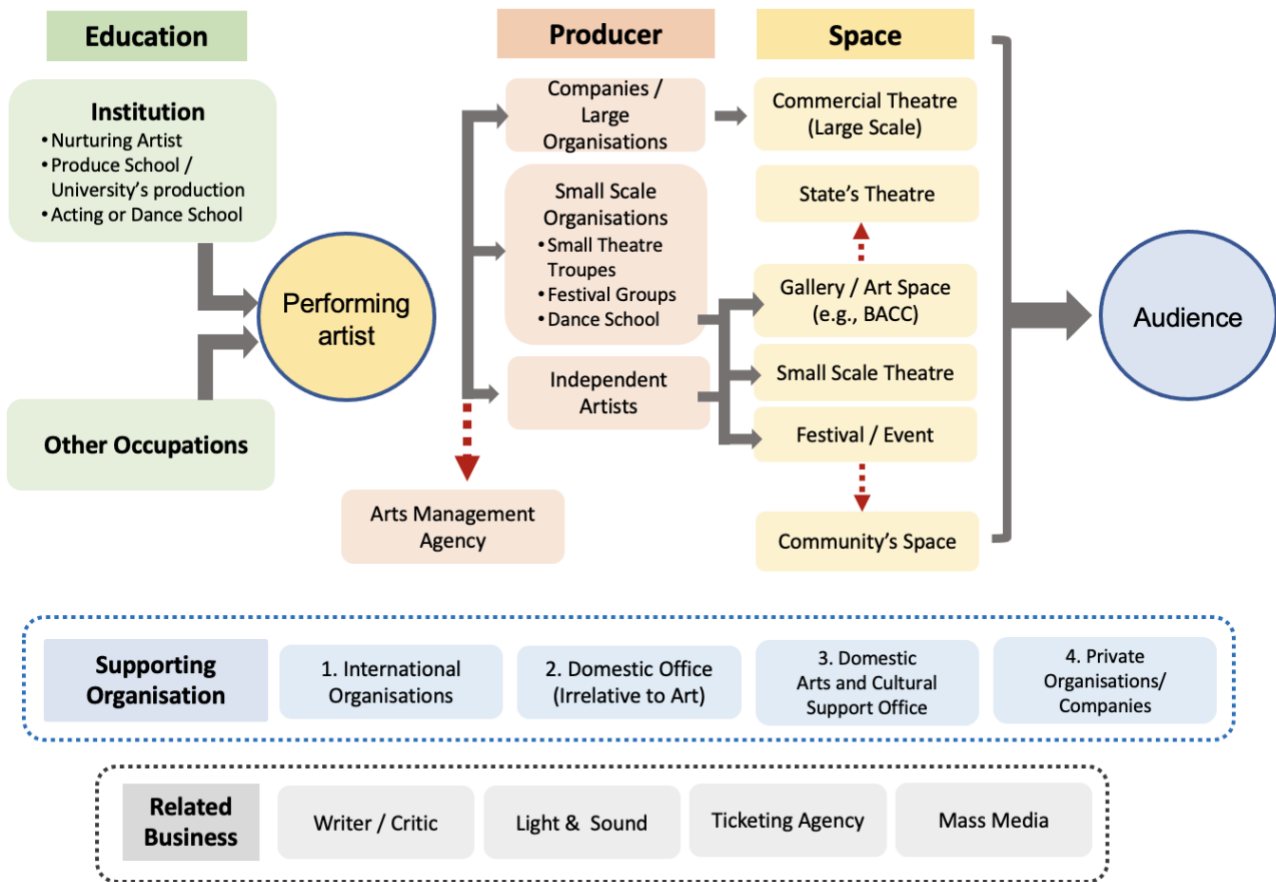
It can be argued that although the government's officers personally shared the views of Thainess and contemporaneity with other stakeholders in the contemporary performing arts sector, they must manage their authorities by following the policy from the top. This seems to be a mechanism of the Thai government to protect traditional arts and culture as national heritage.

5.2 Funding difficulties and the complications of Thainess

Although insufficient financial support for contemporary arts in Thai arts and cultural systems has always been a major debate among performing arts stakeholders, Thailand's Creative Economy Agency (CEA), a public organisation to promote Thai creative industries, sought to address the issue. In 2020, the CEA launched the Creative Industries Development Report: Performing Arts which describes the ecosystem of the performing arts industry in Thailand, shown in the Figure 27 below.

When focusing on the issue of funding support, CEA indicates that there are four sources of funding organisations: 1) international organisations; 2) domestic offices or organisations; 3) domestic Arts and Cultural Support Office and 4) private organisations or companies. CEA ranks funding organisations based on their efficiency in providing and managing funds (Creative Economy Agency, 2020).

Figure 27: The ecosystem of Thai performing arts industries

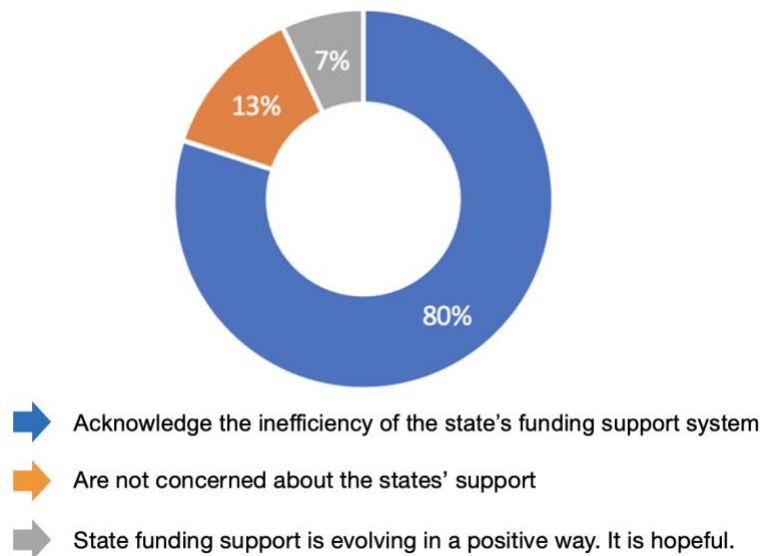


(© Creative Economy Agency, 2020)

Unsurprisingly, international organisations (e.g., Japan Foundation, Goethe Institute, French Embassy, Israel Embassy, British Council, and Korean Cultural Centre) and domestic offices that are unrelated to art fields (such as Thai Health Promotion Foundation and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau) are the first two active funding organisations, while state offices under the Ministry of Culture, like the OCAC and the Fine Arts Department, and private companies or corporate sponsors are the bottom two. This report seems to suggest that funding support from governmental authorities for arts and culture is a topic of discussion among performing artists. Nonetheless, apart from an evaluation of its inefficiency, the CEA's report officially confirms the fact that Thailand has state's support system for the arts.

However, when this research raised the issue of the capacity of the Thai government funding support system in the in-depth interviews with stakeholders in the contemporary performing arts sector, the study discovered more insights on the constraints facing Thai performing artists. Their responses can be classified into 3 groups as seen in Figure 28 below. Most in-depth interviewees (80%) agreed that state financial support system lacks efficiency, while 13% said that they pay no attention to state's funding support but focus on the survival of their organisations without outside help.

Figure 28: Opinions on Thai state's funding support system



Additionally, 7% of the interviewees said that state's funding and support was improving and changing in a positive direction. As one indicated, 'Government funding support, the OCAC for example, is more open-minded than before. Recently, some performance artists received funds for the Asiatopia performance art event' (IDI-01). She also mentioned alternative options for available government funding sources, like the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, which is suitable for community-based projects or health issues-based projects (ibid.), and the Social Innovation Project of the National Innovation Agency (NIA). The NIA launches grants under this social innovation scheme in many sectors, including 4 categories: 1) Sectoral Social Innovation Project, 2) City and Community Innovation Challenge, 3) Social Innovation Village and 4) Social Innovation Driving Unit or SID (National Innovation Agency, 2020). This grant is an option for performing artists as their projects are eligible for support in the 1st category: Sectoral Social Innovation Project under the section of tourism and culture with a maximum of 1.5 million baht per project (IDI-01). However, the latter two sources are specific-purpose grants, not arts-focused funds, while only grants from the OCAC are art support funds.

On the other hand, most interviewees (80%) who acknowledged the inefficiency of the government's funding support system shared various experiences in dealing with the state's offices. 6 key constraints can be summarised from their opinions, as discussed below.

1) The government funding decision-making process lacks transparency.

Arts organisations often question the transparency and decision-making of Thai government officials, particularly their efficiency in developing thought on arts development. One festival director pointed out that 'We do not know how they make the decision to fund the project. There are no concrete

criteria, and their notions of contemporary content are still about virtue and vice or being good citizens. It is the same as fifty years ago' (IDI-02). Another artistic director of an art space agreed that the unfair funding situation right now is still not different from a decade ago. 'There are new funds, but it is all a game. It seems like internal allocation. Anyway, it is difficult to get support and, though the process might not be difficult, it is not transparent or honest. Sometimes they have a specific target that they will support. It looks like they have a patronage culture and will prioritise their support for members of their networks' (IDI-07). Apart from the issue of state's transparency, an art promoter added that the government budget was too small, and it was centralised. All contemporary arts projects will apply to only one authority, which is the OCAC, which has a small budget and oversees the whole country. Consequently, it is impossible to manage efficiently, not least because they have a budget limit for each project. 'It's ridiculous, not only the centralisation but also the provision of limited resources. And all artists, either veteran or young artists, will be considered using the same criteria, so it's too hard and not sensible' (IDI-11). A young veteran performing artist added 'Either from the Ministry of Culture or the OCAC, there are only few budgets, and the process is unfair. It is a competition without any specific criteria, namely veteran or renowned artists and young artists have to compete with each other' (IDI-04). Moreover, he also shared an interesting view on this funding issue:

If the funding system worked well, I would have hope. Everyone survives on hope. But now no one gets up in the morning and enthusiastically discusses their idea of creating work to get those funds as we hope to receive them. When the grants are announced, everyone just feels like trying to get them but does not expect anything. So, I evaluate the funding system from this hopeless viewpoint because no one feels that they will get that support. The solution is for the government to make an effort to convince people that they can compete for those grants. They can fight to receive support from that public money. The state needs to carefully set fair criteria for funding, and each criterion should have its own track. Funding agency should provide funding categories that are more inclusive. Right now, it's like it was 10 years ago. If you ask the new generation of theatre creators and they do not eagerly talk about it, it shows that you cannot encourage artists under your care to have hope. The state established this office to support us, but there's no hope in it. (ibid.).

2) Grants are usually short-term, inconsistent and delivered in small amounts for each project with a massive demand.

The 'OCAC loves projects that have high impact but low budget' (IDI-13), a foundation director pointed out. An artistic director from an art space concurred: 'Thai funders usually pay less but want to get more. They are encouraging us to spend less. We have to find possible solutions to spend less money to create work for their KPI. This reminds me. Have they heard of human rights?' (IDI-07). Many arts organisations fear getting support from the state (although it is a state's duty to support the arts), as they feel exploited. They realised that 'foreign funds are more supportive and

sensible. Though the work might not be as successful as planned, if you can justify it, foreign funders will be considerate and support us, but Thai funders will be inflexible and unsupportive without understanding' (ibid.).

A respected festival director shared another view on this problem. To him, the authorities lack the vision to consider what they should continue supporting and what they shouldn't. 'Inconsistent funding support is a key issue. The state's office is unable to plan ahead or consider support continuity, but it can be done' (IDI-05). Grants are offered only year-by-year, with too little money and too many requirements. The state's office 'grants us, for example, 100 baht but requires us to work like we receive 1,000 baht, plus send a paper with hundreds of pages. It consumes lots of artists' energy. Artists who have to deal with this system will burn out, and the burdensome requirements will eat up all the money. This echoes the government's ideology of Thainess: we must sacrifice for society. Artists also have to earn a living, don't they?' (ibid.).

3) The government mechanism, its procedure and staffs' attitude are the main barriers. The OCAC, in particular, is not supportive, not only in terms of funding, but also in other aspects when artists need assistance from its authority. One representative from an international performing arts event director, from personal experience in dealing with an OCAC's official, argued that

Honestly, if it is a channel through which we directly connect with international communities, it's okay, as we do not have to depend on the government. We can have resources from overseas. But the government's function affects us as it generates inconvenient operations. For example, at the end of 2021, when the COVID-19 situation seemed to have lessened, we had a plan to launch a production overseas. There was an invitation from overseas; instead of celebrating our opportunity, the government did not facilitate our travel. When we contacted the OCAC, there were doubts or questions like why we had to go. We were investigated and interrogated until we gave up. What we needed from the OCAC was only their help with the quarantine process, not money or other support. But the conversation could not progress to the point, as we were overwhelmed with big chunks of questions and couldn't move forward. They subjected us to interrogation as if they did not trust us, as if they never knew who we were. We felt unworthy of their help to provide us with valid documents. Finally, we gave up and did not care about their support. We relied on ourselves (IDI-03).

This example illustrates the real situation that regularly happens to art organisations when they have to contact government officials. Sometimes it seems to generate more trouble for artists than helping them. The main problem is that 'they are civil servants who do not understand how to support or nurture the works of art. Their attitude towards their people still has a hierarchical relationship between the boss (civil servants) and subordinates (people or artists)' (IDI-10). 'The officials know the rules well, but most of them don't really have knowledge of or understand contemporary arts' (IDI-11). Furthermore, a veteran artist also mentioned some issues about the responsibility of the

OCAC: 'actually, government officials should be guardians or supporters of artists or art workers, but they cannot speak for us or defend us. If I create a production that is quite critical or thought provoking, they all run away immediately. They will not be here beside you to help defend for artists' (IDI-10).

In addition, there are some rules that make no sense, when artists receive grants from the OCAC which is public money. Artists are unable to sell show tickets and thus those performances must be launched to the public for free. This is a controversial issue among artists and arts organisation as one senior artist explained 'the problem is not about ticket sale, but government should provide full support. Very weird condition' (ibid.). A veteran festival director commented on this unacceptable rule as he realised that it exploited art workers because the state subsidises only a small amount not the full cost. He complained and negotiated with the OCAC that 'they granted us only little money, and those budgets covered only 1 showtime. If they want to support us in all 10 showtimes, they need to invest more money. They could not force us; it doesn't make sense that they granted us little money and did not permit us to sell tickets. Their small grant couldn't cover all the costs that we invested, in the end we came to an understanding, though after lengthy negotiation' (IDI-05).

A senior critic who had attended many theatre festivals overseas noticed that not only the Ministry of Culture but also the other Ministries' officials lacked any understanding on Thai contemporary arts. One example is how staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – those assigned to work for the Thai Embassy overseas – have hardly been exposed to Thai contemporary arts. He argued, 'I don't know whether they have a position like the Cultural Attaché there. So when they have to stage any Thai performances overseas, those selected performances are normally Thai classical dance, *khon* or traditional works only. It can be seen that the Ministry or authorities that have to promote Thai culture do not know and are unable to see the real dynamics of Thai culture' (IDI-08). He also mentioned the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) as it presents only traditional aspects or natural attractions, as seen on a poster with the temple of the Emerald Buddha or Thai beaches. 'It cannot see the contemporaneity of Thailand. It cannot see the real Thailand. The government doesn't see that' (ibid.). In addition, he indicated 'it reflects that all government authorities lack communication with each other. Not only does the Ministry of Culture not connect or communicate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but the Ministry of Sports and Tourism also doesn't communicate with the Ministry of Culture. Each ministry only focuses on its own job but does not work together as a team that shares the same goals. So, when there is any problem, they will put the blame on others' (ibid.).

In dealing with the other state's funders that are irrelative to art fields, a festival director recalled his past experiences with a state's foundation, 'actually their staff is really nice and supportive, but the internal processes are overwhelming. Once we receive the grants, there are processes by which we have to present our project for their internal meeting, but it doesn't end there. We have to deal with

infinite meetings again and again with many levels of their staff. It is run by a Thai ancient hierarchical system (patronage system, *munnai* system, ระบบอุปถัมภ์), and you need to present your project to each level of those superiors. Meetings consume energy and time as much as I can make 10 theatre productions. We also have to prepare massive paperwork after finishing the project' (IDI-05).

Regarding sponsorship from corporate or private funders, 'corporate sponsorship is rare because donations or sponsorships for the arts cannot get tax deductions. Our country does not grant this incentive for supporting the arts' (IDI-01), an interviewee argued. This seems to be the main reason why the corporate or private sponsor is not interested in supporting the arts. On this issue, another interviewee raised his observation in the state system that

I think in Thailand it was blocked by the government. In developed countries, many arts organisations can receive a lot of money from private companies because those companies are granted a deduction in or exemption from income tax. I'm not sure if the Thai government knows about it or not. In Thailand, these incentives for corporate or private companies to direct donations for the arts are blocked. There are only five kinds of funds of the Ministry of Culture that the donors can be granted for income tax deduction. This is a control of art support that, finally, what kind of art, what kind of thought or political attitudes, will be supported by the state. That's why theatre makers do not care and focus only on its own survival or wait for foreign funding instead (IDI-08).

This shows that the state's mechanism is more complicated than it appears on the surface. A festival artistic director also discussed barriers from government mechanism: 'On-ground staff (artists) are ready to go and seek any opportunities, but Thailand is constrained by a few factors' (IDI-03). For example, in late 2022, 4-5 Thai productions were invited to show overseas. 'It shows that the dynamic at home suffers from these limitations, but when artists have opportunities overseas, they can go immediately. They do not wait for the government. Though they want the government to take part, they cannot wait' (ibid.). Finally, self-salvation may be a good answer for a thriving artist in this country, as most of them decide not to wait or care about the government and find more opportunity in international communities by themselves.

4) Grants that specifically encourage the arts are very few.

Most funds are from domestic offices unrelated to art fields, and these offices have specific purposes for funding (e.g., health promotion, safety media encouragement and contribution to the economy). Artists, therefore, have to tailor their work's content to match the objectives of each funder to attain those grants. Some argued that this situation reflected the fact that the Thai government did not truly understand the arts.

Regarding corporate sponsorship or private support, a foundation director argued that it was, 'really hopeless not only because of the current economic crisis, but Thailand does not have any tax incentives or deductions for corporate companies to support art' (IDI-13). She used to approach corporate companies without any incentive for them and was asked how the company would benefit from a donation. Therefore, it is hard to get support from a private company. She also mentioned international non-profit organisations in Thailand, saying that these organisations 'don't have many grants, but they do have spaces. I checked all sectors, and there is only the BACC that is reliable' (ibid.).

In addition to the above funding overview from the foundation director, an international festival director also shared some experience with the state offices, stating that each office has its own goal which differs from others. This affects how artists propose their project for funding support. 'For example, the OCAC or the Culture, Sports and Tourism Department of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration has quite a specific image of arts and cultural works in their views, and these works must only fit their specific objectives. If artists proposed projects conveying other topics, they will not be interested in them. This is quite a large barrier' (IDI-03). There seem to be various kinds of funds, but most are not specifically funds for the arts while offices directly responsible for supporting the arts do not have much money. It cannot be denied that this situation generates barriers for thriving arts organisations. This is why most stakeholders agreed without any hesitation that funding support in Thailand is inefficient, as one interviewee argued, 'artists must tailor their projects to match the different objectives of each funding agency. It means that no one truly understands what the arts are contributing or what artists are doing' (ibid.).

Besides, a veteran performing arts festival director shared his insights on some unexpected issues with a funder who supported his festival. The festival received a grant from a foundation that promotes good health. Although the grant did not cover the whole project, there is a regulation that does not allow the festival team to smoke, drink, or sell any alcohol. He pointed out, 'It is impossible for the festival because we have to deal with many festival partners whose concept is that theatre can happen anywhere. For example, some venues are bars and restaurants that supposed to earn money from selling drinks. We cannot tell them that a festival funder did not permit the venues to sell any beers or wines during the festival because the percentage of profit from ticket sales that we share to those venues is also not much' (IDI-05). The festival had to negotiate with the funder and received support for only two consecutive years. He stated that 'Actually, the funder is really happy, as our festival can increase accessibility to a diverse group of targets. We had many activities and campaign for health promotion during the festival such as campaign performances, theatre competitions on health promotion content, etc. We did all these, but the funder still does not allow us to smoke or drink alcohol' (ibid.). This is an interesting issue related to the moral standard of Thai

Buddhism. He critically argued, 'This is not respecting our personal rights. Their attitude is that alcohol is 100% bad, but we think differently. In our opinion, over-drinking is bad, and alcohol does not equal badness' (ibid.). This example also reflects the different viewpoints of the state and its people on the moral standard of Thai Buddhism.

5) The state's vision emphasises economic growth and instrumental value; GDP is the main indicator of this achievement.

There are some key state organisations that play an important role in promoting economic growth. CEA and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) are public organisations that were named by most of the interviewees to have a more progressive vision than other government offices. TCEB was established to support international event-making. A founder of an international festival shared experience in receiving some grant from TCEB.

Their staff attitude is really good. Their vision is quite progressive; they are reasonable, understanding, and supportive. They support both mega-events and home-grown criteria. Home-grown criteria are small-scale international projects under some regulations in terms of the minimum number of performances and participating countries. For example, a festival must have at least eight countries participating; these are some limitations. However, TCEB will send their research team to observe the festival and collect some data, particularly information about the economic impact of the festival. How the festival contributes to the country's economy. Though this is useful, it is economic impact, not intellectual or cultural impact, that we also need help with (IDI-02).|

An artistic director of another international festival also agreed that these organisations' staff had positive attitudes. Her view was based on her experience in dealing with the CEA. She said that 'their staff is open-minded and progressive, but it is an organisation under the Office of the Prime Minister. So, it is limited by central government policy. Although they listen to us and understand us, there are some things they can do and some things they can't do because they might not fit their central policy' (IDI-03). Economic evaluation is a key process for these organisations to measure projects' contribution to economic value. A veteran critic confirmed that 'we need to understand that CEA or TCEB will support only marketable projects that are able to meet their economic value. It's obvious that performing arts are not the main category of promotion' (IDI-08). In 2021, PM Prayut announced five Fs sectors that the government would promote, i.e., film, food, fighting sports, festivals and fashion. He added, '...because the government believes that these sectors are marketable in the global market. Nonetheless, performing arts can be included in the festival sector, but that is not the problem. The constraint will loop back onto the query on traditional and contemporary issues if we are still unable to clarify the framework of tradition and contemporary' (ibid.). An interviewee from an international festival agreed that economic measurement is 'also

another barrier for us, as is the issue of the arts being stalled by the state. We shall not win in this battle if the arts are valued by their economic impact, such as the calculation of money spent during the festival or the number of inbound flights' (IDI-03). In addition, she argued, 'The economic impact of the arts can be accessed, but this is only one of the merits of the arts. This is not the core value of the arts. Now the state prefers only to hear economical answers: how much money can we receive? How do we export it?' (ibid.).

6) The conflict underlying the relationship between tradition and contemporaneity generates dilemmas for contemporary artists

From some artists' viewpoints, the government has a negative attitude towards the contemporary arts as its ideology seems to oppose traditional arts. An international festival director argued, 'The problem is that the Thai government is concerned only with tradition, which is called Thainess. They are not aware that we also live for the future. It shows that they do not keep up with the current world. They know well how to strengthen Thai culture and Thainess. They limit their way of interpreting Thainess to only traditional culture' (IDI-02). While another veteran performing artist pointed out that the main objectives of the Thai government 'are to support nationhood, religion, and monarchy, but contemporary work has another principle. Specifically, contemporary artists raise critical questions and encourage equality, equity, diversity, and individuality. These issues generate freedom in thought and expression that traditional works don't. Therefore, they are totally different' (IDI-10). He added 'the different definition of Thainess from the state is not a problem with our work creation, but it generates problems with funding support if we want it from the government. They will not support us' (ibid.). A festival director agreed that the notion of Thainess from the state's view 'affects contemporary performing arts because it prevents us from receiving funding support. I do not understand them. Their job should promote contemporary culture but why do their works overlap with an agency that works on heritage?' (IDI-02). Another festival director argued, 'now, everything follows national policy, which is static and unchangeable. I mean, it is not flexible with the nationhood, Thainess and Thai culture, so there is no opportunity for other creativities. In addition, new works are usually subjected to censorship' (IDI-03). Another artist noted that 'the OCAC nowadays, honestly, doesn't support any contemporary arts at all. They focus mainly on tradition to support the Ministry of Culture because most of their projects reflect a truly traditional system' (IDI-10).

Even though discussion among most interviewees revolved around weakness of state financial support, as mentioned above, some informants (13%) argued that they believed in managing their organisations by themselves rather than relying on other support. A veteran contemporary dance company owner, choreographer and international contemporary dance festival director explained the state's stance that 'our country has its own performing arts forms (traditional forms), and the state is mainly concerned with what it has already had rather than contemporaneity. In addition, their

vision of contemporaneity centres on Thai traditional arts and culture. I understand them, despite having totally different thoughts on contemporaneity' (IDI-15). Due to this difference, he was not concerned about the government's policy but focused on his own company's strategy to maintain a contemporary dance company in Thailand. He pointed out:

As my works are very *farang* style, I have a golden rule when creating new work. It must be marketable. Balance between artistry and market is a key. I can answer with certainty what my audiences want to watch and what they like. Certainly, I know what I want to do but I will not blindly focus on my demand. I need to think from my audiences' points of view as well. Besides, I found my own signature. I know the unique beauty of my works... My creative works might be far beyond the thought of the government (ibid.).

This contemporary dance company and its festival relied on private funds. They are raising funds and support from their foreign partners. In managing his international dance festival, he stated that '90% of the budget came from international partners. Foreign artists will also help me find grant support from their home country because normally their country will have an artist support scheme for international touring. So I start from this point' (ibid.). Other incomes of this festival come from private patrons, i.e., its fanbase, and corporate partners, and hotels and venues. 'No state support because I did not apply for any. No need to waste the time' (ibid.), as he knew well that the style of his festival was different from the kind of work that the government will be interested in. Furthermore, he mentioned, 'When I established my company, I had to ask myself how to survive. It is important that my company is self-sustainable first, without support from others. Once it survives, other state's supports will come automatically' (ibid.).

This is a case of a successful Thai contemporary dance company and international festival that confirmed its belief in self-sustainability and focused on how to market its works by balancing artistic quality with audience's needs. A member of the digital press agency for the performing arts agreed on this pathway of self-support, as he kept working hard to find the most appropriate business model to maintain the only digital press agency for performing arts in Thailand. He argued,

When first setting up this company, I was quite against the model whereby theatre companies rely on government funding support, or funding project. It seems to be unsustainable in my opinion as artists have to infinitely apply for support. I would rather see the performance as a product because currently productions rely on support from others. Therefore, I believe in commercially self-sustainability. If this product has the value for its maker, the value for audience must be discovered. Once found, it will generate a sustainable cycle... I'm not quite sure, but I don't believe in funding support because if it needs funding support, it means that it can't be self-sufficient (IDI-12).

However, this belief is not yet proven. He is still seeking the most suitable model for his company.

The two above cases highlight the different visions of most informants in organisational management. The latter case wants to employ business management know-how to sustain its organisation, even though it is hard to thrive in this performing arts sector. The former does not care about Thai state support and utilises marketing tools to balance artistic production and its accessibility to the audience, even though foreign funding support is still crucial for achieving its production and festival. This suggests that foreign funding support plays a significant role in fostering contemporary performing arts in Thailand. Nevertheless, some questions emerge whether this international funding really benefits contemporary performing arts organisations in Thailand. This question will be addressed in the next section.

5.3 Is international funding a boon for Thai contemporary performing artists and their audience?

Foreign agencies' funding is a key source of financial support for many contemporary performing arts organisations in Thailand. Many interviewees agreed that most foreign agencies in Thailand were very active in their funding and support (IDI-01; IDI-02; IDI-03; IDI-07; IDI-08; IDI-10; IDI-11; IDI-13). Among the key agencies are the Japan Foundation, the Goethe Institute, the French Embassy, the Alliance Française, the Portuguese Embassy, the Embassy of Israel, the Korean Cultural Centre.

A veteran international festival director shared her experiences on receiving funding from overseas agencies. Normally, funders will allocate money to support artists. Specifically, this covers general costs such as transportation, freight, accommodation, etc. The level of support in each country also differs, depending on their policy to invest in promoting their culture in Thailand. Nonetheless, the French Embassy and the Japanese Embassy, for example, provide substantial aid. The Japanese Embassy normally supports full costs if the festival invites a production from Japan to perform at the festival. The Japanese Embassy is responsible for all costs, including artist fees, air tickets, freight, and accommodation. The interviewee confirmed that 'receiving support for the artist fees is really helpful for the festival; normally, the festival will pay the artist fees from ticket sales' (IDI-02). The other international festival director agreed on this advantage: getting financial support from foreign agencies is easier. Generally, there are two cases. Firstly, in the case of touring production, when the festival overseas invites Thai artists, they will cover all costs. The festival itself will have additional support from its local government or partners. The other case is support from foreign agencies based in Thailand, such as foreign embassies and their cultural missions. 'Actually, they aim to promote cultural diplomacy, so they already have cultural centres in Thailand' (IDI-03). The artistic director of an arts space in a regional area also shared her experience that foreign agencies have a clearer vision and are more straightforward if they have an agenda to support artists. Arts organisations do

not have to explain that much. In addition, she pointed out that foreign funds are more flexible and practical. In the event that she needs to adjust her project, the funder will evaluate its outcome onsite. Though the project might not achieve its planned objectives, it would be okay if the grantee could explain the reasons why (IDI-07). An artistic director of a renowned contemporary dance company strongly confirmed the advantages of international funding agencies support:

Foreign agencies give us 100% of our freedom once they have decided to support us. After we share our ideas and they agree with us, they will not intervene, because if they do not agree, they will reject us from the beginning. The process is not complicated. We send only a quotation and wait for the show date. There might be some small requests, such as writing a show description and sending them some performance photos for show promotion. On the show date, they might ask for an interview with the local press. That's it (IDI-10).

While discussing foreign support with each interviewee, some points of discussion emerged reflecting their comparative thoughts on the ability of Thai state agencies to do their job. An artistic director of a regional arts space indicated the difficulty in dealing with Thai state officials, saying that 'talking with Thai state organisations is more difficult. It might be because a group of people who have power or those funding officials do not actually understand the potentiality of art, while foreigners generally are concerned with art from a general aesthetic perspective and are well aware of soft power' (IDI-07). In addition, one of the veteran artists argued that the complicated grant application process of the OCAC means that 'if we want to receive a grant from the OCAC, we need to prepare hundreds of pages of documents, and we do not know for sure whether we will receive it' (ibid.). Moreover, a young artistic director of an international festival related good experiences in dealing with foreign cultural agencies in Thailand compared to contact with Thai state officials. Foreign agencies' representatives are committed to connecting with local art and culture (IDI-03). She pointed out:

All of the directors from those agencies certainly knew more Thai artists than the OCAC's staff. They are doing the kind of work that Thai officials do not do. I can see officials from these foreign agencies at all art events. They can have casual meetings with artists or even sip coffee together, which I've never seen Thai officials do. So, it's an arm-length relationship, while Thai officials have hierarchy or seniority. We cannot sit together and share our mission or talk about how we work together. These kinds of conversations never happen with the Thai government, but we can always have them with foreign agencies or even foreign embassies. The weak point is that I think the Thai ministry's officials do not know what to do as their working mission is different from the mission of foreign officials (IDI-03).]

This is a controversial issue among contemporary artists, reflecting that the OCAC's officials are incapable of connecting with Thai artists. In contrast to the uncomfortable relationship with Thai state officials, they receive well-deserved treatment and respect as valuable artists from foreign agencies.

Besides, a representative from an art centre indicated that many Thai cutting-edge performances nowadays happen because of the support from foreign agencies. Those productions were universal productions, and everyone or every nation can watch them, but Thai people do not have any chance to watch some productions (IDI-01). She also mentioned, 'A veteran artist used to do crowd funding to launch his production in Thailand, but unfortunately, the raised funds were not enough, so it couldn't happen. Many productions from other theatre troupes have a chance to premiere overseas before returning to Thailand. The most interesting point is that when those productions came to launch in Thailand, their presentation was supported by private partners' (ibid.), not the Thai government. These incidents illustrate that the Thai government is not concerned with the necessary support for those promising productions; non-mainstream Thai contemporary performing arts seem to be invisible from the Thai government viewpoint.

Furthermore, this foreign support not only benefits performing arts organisations and artists but also helps to foster performing arts audiences. An international festival director pointed out the advantage of importing excellent international productions to Thailand. Importing works from overseas is needed because it helps inspire Thai audiences. Thai artists can get new ideas or alternatives from watching others' works. 'I think this is very important. It can help open the horizons of audiences, artists, or art workers by seeing other possibilities or being exposed to other thoughts and creativity in different contexts' (IDI-03). Due to the support of these foreign cultural agencies, it is a good opportunity for Thai audiences to experience excellent productions by internationally acclaimed artists.

Nevertheless, a respected international festival director remarked that exportable international productions might be limited in practice due to the condition of each country's policies. She stated that she had to curate the shows from various international companies and then ask for their countries' support as well. Namely, she must consider the possibility of getting funding from those countries' offices in Thailand. She argued, 'For example, I used to plan for a production from Laos, Cambodia, or South American countries, but it was so difficult as those countries do not have funding support in Thailand. Some countries may have money, but culture is not included in their foreign affairs policies in Thailand' (IDI-02). Therefore, there is a limitation to the range of countries from which the festival can receive funding to support cultural activities in Thailand. She indicated, 'It is a win-win situation, as I state clearly in the proposal that our festival will promote their culture' (ibid.). Thai organisations who are dealing with these foreign agencies know well that they have an agenda. An informant states, 'To be honest, there is no true goodwill; definitely, those foreign agencies have their motives in doing this. Actually, they surely achieve their goals because they can promote their countries or influence everyone they connect with. So, there is French-ness, German-ness here and there. This reflects their governments' broad-minded vision' (IDI-03). A foundation director also

pointed out, 'On the surface, it might be funding for collaboration between Thai and foreign artists, but it hugely benefits Thai artists in terms of fostering content creation. France, for instance, will not mind about content. They behave like patrons and give money to artists to do what they want. As artists have freedom, it helps to flourish many creations and progressions in the contemporary performing arts field' (IDI-13). Compared with receiving grants from the OCAC, he argued, 'artists must report their deliverable benefits, how many audiences they reached out to, and whether they have to scope their content to only some specific issues. There are many constraints and limitations, so it is difficult to move forward' (ibid.).

While there are some benefits from foreign financial support in the non-mainstream Thai performing arts sector; many artists agreed that these foreign grants had a lot of positive outcomes and are better than dealing with Thai state offices, some informants argued that the non-mainstream Thai performing arts sector also needed to take some basic precautions to secure domestic funding resources. A regional festival director critically stated

Actually, these foreign organisations do not have to help our artists or art workers or even Thailand. They just carry out their own cultural policy. Therefore, if Thai artists or organisations are still able to deliver those foreign agencies' goals, they will support us. However, when those countries change their policy, it's all gone as well. Finally, if we do not improve funding situation in Thailand, it is definitely unsustainable (IDI-07).

He emphasised that those foreign organisations did not have any responsibility for Thai artists. There were many kinds of grants that Thai artists received. Normally, foreign agencies will have a standard rate for artist's wage that Thai organisations must pay, or those agencies will keep the budgets for their own artists. For example, he indicated, 'If we receive \$10,000 in total, their standard artists' fee and per diem will be deducted from this budget to give foreign artists. The money left after deduction will be the amount that we have to manage for our whole project' (ibid.). In some cases, if the remaining budget is tight, after deduction of that amount from the foreign artists' budget, the Thai organisation must decrease the wage of Thai artists and workers to keep the project going 'because Thai art workers are not protected by those regulations' (ibid.).

A veteran theatre critic also commented on this point, stating that 'receiving foreign funds also has conditions because, finally, we need to accept that it is the foreign agencies' money. Our artists are still inferior; it's a pity' (IDI-08). However, from the view of performing arts organisations, dealing with this condition might be easier than dealing with the inefficiencies and imbalances of the Thai state. On this point, he suggested some possible solutions with more effort from the Thai government, as 'the Ministry of Culture of other countries normally will provide matching funds. They do not cover the whole costs but support only half to encourage their artists to get more input. If our Ministry of Culture does not worry much about the issues of political expression, we can support our Thai artists

so that they are on equal footing with foreign artists' (ibid.). This idea seems to be a sensible solution for the non-mainstream performing arts sector, but it is likely a dream that will never come true. In real practice, the issue of political expression is the key restriction of the Thai government. In the earlier discussion of contemporary performing arts and Thainess, it seems that the contemporary artists' definition of Thainess is the opposite of the Thai state's version. While contemporary artists believe in freedom of speech in their performances' messages, the Thai state focuses on protecting the three pillars of the country: nation, religion and monarchy. This is why most Thai cutting-edge performing artists who received foreign support have to launch their debut overseas. If those overseas premieres end up being shown to Thai audiences, then it is impossible to get state support. As an interviewee from the arts centre argued above, normally these performances in Thailand get support from the private sector.

Financial support from foreign agencies is thus a double-edged sword, with pros and cons. Even though this support may help foster their soft power, foreign agencies can directly and indirectly help Thai contemporary performing arts thrive in their artist creations and in audience development.

Chapter 6: Discussion of findings

In this chapter, the findings from the document data and interview data, i.e., in-depth interviews and focus groups, are discussed and interpreted to respond to the research questions (RQ) and research sub-questions (RSQ) found in Chapter 1, Section 1.4.

6.1 *Farang* influence and Thai leaders' gaze of admiration

Since the arrival to Siam of many foreign groups during the Ayutthaya period (esp. from the seventeenth century onwards), the country has experienced many influences from foreign countries and adapted it into various expressive forms, particularly in architecture. Absorbing foreign cultural elements persisted into later Thai history. Since then, Siam formed what Foucault (1975) would consider a power-focused-eye as the gaze for domination, illustrating socio-political power connections. The names Siamese used to identify others, like *jin* or *jek* (Chinese), *khaek* (Middle or South Asians) or *farang* (Caucasians) indicate an attitude of Siamese superiority. Nonetheless, foreign influences, particularly from western countries, became prominent in the nineteenth century colonial period under western powers, in the reigns of Kings Rama IV, V and VI of the Rattanakosin period. Siamese kings saw what had happened to neighbouring states and empires, and then learned to adapt to this new western culture to avoid full colonisation. The introduction of new western or *farang* culture formed the Siamese kings' gazes on *farang* power, what Peter A. Jackson calls the 'outward gaze' (2010) that looked out towards outsiders. This type of psychological conflicts recurred through the gaze of Siamese kings admiring *farang*, who embodied at the time modern civilisation (Kitiarsa, 2010). Siamese leaders' sought to be recognised as civilised according to *farang* standards of the time. The Siamese admiration of *farang* added another aspect to the Siamese leaders' gaze, now as an inward gaze, with a domineering view of local or other ethnic people who were subordinates within Siam (Jackson, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 4 (Sections 4.2.3, 4.2.4 and 4.2.5), many western styles of development and culture especially in the arts, architecture and performing arts were brought to the Siamese court as part of a process of creating a new 'civilisation' for the kingdom. Although Siamese proudly claim to have never been colonised, Siam (or Thailand) formed a 'semicolonial form of power' (ibid.), and both Siamese elites and commoner leaders after the 1932 revolution were 'colonised in consciousness' (Reynolds, 1999, p. 263). Furthermore, as Kitiarsa (2010) pinpoints, this perspective suggests that even when considering Thainess today, *farang* influence is unavoidable as an 'allure of *farang*-ness' (ibid., p. 73), which helps hybridise and negotiate contemporary Thainess.

The dual *farang* influence and the Siamese admiring gaze discussed above partially supports response to RQ 1, since Siam's or Thai leaders have both an outward gaze towards the *farang* as a

source of power and form a national identity based on western influence. These conditions affect the perception of Thai general public on how contemporary performing arts do exist in Thai society.

6.2 The leaders' gaze on the Thai-self and political ideology of Thainess

In the early period of Thai nationalism, under absolute monarchy, being loyal to Siam's kings was the only way to be authentically Thai (Asvabahu, 1974) while using the Thai language was a key sign of being Thai. Siam at the time flourished and became more centralised than ever as a semi-colonised state under absolute monarchy. Thongchai Winichakul calls this an era of 'royal nationalism', following the mainstream narrative of nationalism (2008). Siamese leaders gradually turned Siam into a nation, that is as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006) under King Rama VI, who brought much western culture to the royal court, from where Siamese elites then nourished and developed it. In his *Siam Observer* article, he expressed concern that the Siamese arts were in decline due to too much influence of western culture. This led him to trace his nation's roots while composing a national history that was part of an imaginative process which Charnvit Kasetsiri identifies as mainstream Thai history (2016). King Rama VI and Prince Damrong Rajanubhab produced the first mainstream Thai history, and Kasetsiri categorises it as *Royal nationalistic history* for its focus on the monarchy and the glorification of ancient Siamese states centred in three capital cities (Sukhothai, Ayutthaya and Rattanakisin) (ibid.). Traditional arts and culture were recovered after their long-abandonment under his father, king Rama V. This king's practice of Thainess for the people resembled a national ideology.

In the second period of Thai nationalism, after the 1932 revolution that ended absolute monarchy, and during the first regime of Phibunsongkhram, the emphasis was on the modern state and modernising its people. In this period, nation-building by westernisation was dominant. Culture became a tool to boost state power. Phibunsongkhram adapted western ideas to his policies which were enforced by laws aiming to reprogramme new Thai culture and people's lifestyles (Witayasakpan, 1992). It revised political ideology based on western frameworks which differed from that of King Rama VI and shows how Gramsci's hegemony concept made the Thai commoners give spontaneous consent to the ruling class who laid out the public agenda to follow. The proclamation of the twelve *Ratthaniyom* [Cultural Mandates] were launched, inaugurating many crucial changes, such as changing of the country's name from Siam to Thailand, offering guidelines of proper behaviour and conduct, and adjusting lyrics of the national anthem and royal anthem. Luang Wichitwathakan was tasked with creating new forms of westernised Thai theatre as a medium for state propaganda and issued a Royal Decree to classify Thai traditional theatre with reference to a standard western framework. Through these state decrees the new creation of theatres became a state hegemonic genre, and resistance among local or indigenous theatre troupes still exist

(Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). Besides, the other version of mainstream Thai history was also revised by the Fine Arts Department, namely, by Luang Wichitwathakan and Khun Wichitmatra. It presented Thai history as extending back 5,000 years. Thonburi was included as the fourth capital city of the country. The role of military was highlighted for its role as leaders and protectors of the nation from foreign intrusion in this version of history called *Military-bureaucratic national history* (Kasetsiri, 2016). Once Phibunsongkhram resigned in 1946, ending his first regime, all of his pro-western policies were revoked. In the succeeding period the Thai government was more concerned about threats from communist movements which could endanger national security. As Thailand became a member of the UN in 1949, the policies of Phibunsongkhram's second regime shifted to fostering a national culture under UNESCO guidelines. This led to a revival of the classical arts and royal court forms as part of an effort to show the deep roots and refined elegance of Thainess. Those efforts were supported by the new Ministry of Culture in 1952 which sought to preserve and develop traditional arts.

A third era of nationalism and cultural hegemony may be seen in Thailand after the 2014 coup d'état by the royalist general Prayut Chan-o-cha. Its discourse includes concepts such as the *Thainiyom* (Thai admiration), the 2014 issuance of the twelve core values of Thais and the revision of military government's power as *Pracharath* (Civil state). The core state ideology of Thainess was built around three pillars: nationhood, religion (Buddhism in particular) and monarchy. This foundation of Thainess did not neglect international dynamics, so it needed to adjust to the globalised world. Between 2014 and 2023, PM Prayut also wrote ten songs for the Thai people to uplift the spirit of contemporary Thainess. In 2015, the government also issued a new version of Thai history as a part of its propaganda which received many criticisms on its bias and distortion of the contemporary situation. Kasetsiri argues that this version of Thai history is a hybrid style of nationalistic history which combined ideas of royal nationalistic history and military-bureaucratic national history (2016). This latest official version of Thai history stressed the importance of loyal military leaders serving the king who balanced opposing political forces. This view of the political system explains political legitimacy through the military's support of the monarch (ibid.). In addressing issues of love and loyalty to the king and royal family, historical records highlight how a collective devotion to royalist ideas gave consent to the military government's actions to protect the monarchy.

The emergence of the military as a balancing force between the Thai state and the monarch occurred after the coup by General Sarit Thanarat in 1957 (who was Prime Minister from 1958 to 1963) with the creation of a system of despotic paternalism (Chaloemtiarana, 1976; 1979, cited in Hewison, 1997). He inserted strong *lese majeste* laws into a new criminal code just after the coup (Wongcham and Johnson, 2020). Under his rule, there were major shifts in national policy from a modern national culture focus to an economic development focus. The National Economic and Social

Development Plans (NESDPs), issued every 5-years from 1961, have been used as a guide for the country's major policy directions. They systematically neglected general arts and culture as seen in the institutional demotions, in 1958, of the Ministry of Culture to a Division of Culture, and by the transfer of the Fine Arts Department to the Ministry of Education. This led to an upgrading of the classical performing arts which mostly derived from royal court traditions, since they represented the *บารมี* or *barami* [charismatic power] of the monarch (Pramoj, 1996; Wongthed, 1999, Rutnin, 2012) and were recognised as the hallmarks of Thai national heritage. The new National Theatre project started in 1961 and was officially opened by King Rama IX in December 1965. This royalist government met with resistance from intellectuals and young people which gradually arranged demonstrations and protests led by university students during the 1970s. This affected the Thai classical theatre, like *khon*, which was said to embody a hierarchical and royalist view of society that served to uphold the monarchy (Rutnin, 2012).

Since the 1970s, Thai classical arts have arguably come to represent Thainess from the state's view. Data from Thai cultural policies and practices after the Thai government shifted to focus on economic development from 1961 support this claim. Although cultural policies emerging in 1981 do mention fostering local and ethnic cultures, in terms of actual budgeting and policy implementation, Thai government priorities still focused on the traditional culture of Thai elites in Bangkok (Laochokchaikul and Ratnatilaka Na Bhuket, 2024). When the Ministry of Culture was re-established in 2002, many arts and cultural mechanisms were established, such as the OCAC, and this offered a new hope for Thai contemporary performing artists in its early period.

This promising start unfortunately ended with the military coup in 2006, and the ensuing era of political conflicts that resulted in the most recent coup of 2014. These unstable political shifts dramatically affected government policy, which added new constraints to non-mainstream Thai contemporary performing arts. For the post-2014 coup government, Thai arts and culture are part of a narrative of Thai-style democracy which is framed as the 'democratic regime of government with the king as head of the state' (Office of the Council of State, 2017, p.3). This Thai-style democracy strengthens the state's hegemonic and ideological position that emphasises the monarchy and Thai classical arts and culture as representation of long glorified court-centred history. This idea aligns with Saichol Sattayanurak's analysis of current public consensus, where the essence of Thainess is at 'the root of national art and culture' (2020, p. 241). The standard features of Thainess, namely, loyalty to the king, faith in Buddhism, and use of Thai language, admiration of Thai arts or beauty, 'adorn the temperament of Thai people to have the Thai mind, allowing them to accept a hierarchical social structure and centralised political structure to be correct and meritorious by the way of thinking that Thainess makes Thailand good' (ibid.).

Interpretation of policy data in Chapter 4, Sections 4.2.9 and 4.2.10 indicates that Thai cultural policy took shape under economic policy priorities rather than being guided by cultural priorities and it is therefore oriented toward economic outcomes. This can be seen in the recent use of the creative economy and creative industries discourse since 2009 to emphasise cultural tourism. Culture in the 1980s framed the traditional arts and culture as part of Thai national heritage, while policy on contemporary arts and culture just begun in 2002 when the Ministry of Culture was re-established, and the OCAC was officially set up. The idea of creative economy and creative industries emerged in 2009 and were integrated into the 11th NESDP (2012-2016). Since its founding, the OCAC has been part of an unstable political environment which has affected cultural policy by re-emphasising traditional arts and culture. The analysis of the twelve NESDPs in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.9 helps to clarify this argument by showing how they all have prioritised the preservation and restoration of national arts and culture while also monitoring the potential threats to Thai arts and culture – and thus to Thainess – by foreign culture.

Significantly, the new 20-year National Strategy highlights the power of the royalist military government. Its 6 key concentrations begin with national security. In terms of cultural policy, this is built on the three pillars of the country which embody Thainess. Therefore, national security emphasises protecting Thais from any external influences.

Moreover, regarding the budget allocations of the Ministry of Culture to its affiliated offices in the OCAC's action plan between 2020-2022 (as shown in Table 9 and Figure 17 in Chapter 4, Section 4.1.10), data shows that 95% of all budgets were allocated to national arts and culture and religion, far outweighing contemporary arts and culture, which received only 5% in total. This degree of budget allocation aligns with the key visions of each office under the main mission of the Ministry of Culture between 2020-2022 (See Table 10 in Chapter 4). These data confirm how ideologies of the Thai government affect what is desirable and possible for culture in the country.

As a contrasting perspective, an informant from Creative Economy Agency (CEA), an affiliate organisation under the Office of the Prime Minister, shared surprisingly progressive thoughts shaped by a globalised gaze on Thainess in the contemporary performing arts comparing to the OCAC. The CEA has broad minded views for a wide range of contemporary performing arts for both those with traditional root and those new and foreign influenced works; here, *farang* influence does not matter, if a performance can generate money. This is because CEA's key mission is to increase the country's GDP and it focuses on economic outcomes. Foreign influence is acceptable to the state if they can show economic value to the country which outweighs any concerns about Thainess. This contradictory perspectives of the OCAC and CEA illustrate the paradoxical attitudes of the Thai government and its negotiation of the Thainess/*farang* binary in the cultural realm. It also features in policy documents (NESDPs) as presented in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.9. Generally, all NESDPs see

issues of globalisation or contemporary external influences as potential dangers to national arts and culture, and frame these influences as threats to national security. However, in the 12th NESDP (2017-2021) fluid globalisation and media consumption which influences local cultures, and their lifestyle and consumption was seen as an advantage which could offer new opportunities to market creative products and services and therefore help to generate income for the country. In this new plan, the government views Thainess as a negotiable commodity in a market-driven global economic system.

These findings on national budgets in Thai contemporary arts and culture also correlated with the in-depth interviews' findings. Most performing arts' stakeholders (80%) underscored the following key six issues in the inefficiency of state financial support.

- 1) The funding decision process lacks transparency.
- 2) There are only small, short-term grants with demanding requirements.
- 3) Unsupportive government mechanisms, particularly the OCAC and its staff's unpleasant attitude, which creates barriers.
- 4) Sources of funding for arts-focused purposes are limited.
- 5) The state's economic outcome-focused vision overlooks the significance of fostering the arts as primary sources of those marketable products, which is a long-term process.
- 6) The paradoxical relationship between contemporaneity and tradition creates difficulties for thriving contemporary performing arts.

The above points stress how state funding constraints echo their inefficient practices. Besides criticising the small, short-term grants with demanding requirements and limited sources of funding for arts-focused purposes, they also noted the inefficiency operations of the government officials. Issue no. 5 above reflects the problem of policy imbalance as there is a creative economic policy under the CEA. Since the CEA concentrates on enhancing any forms of creative commodities to generate economic outcome, it needs creative products to be market-ready and to be able to make money. The OCAC is the Thai government agency responsible for arts and culture and is supposed to be official primary source for fostering and nurturing contemporary performing artists. But it seems unable to function as efficient incubator for contemporary artists due to many constraints generated by the state. In other words, the government needs creative commodities to launch at a global scale to drive the country's economy, but the government acts as a middleman, searching for ready-made creative products without realistically investing money, time and resources on those who can actually produce those creative products from raw materials (including human creative skills). This situation is reflected in the artists' complaints about how the Thai government distributes its small grants to contemporary artists, with high demands which ask for making a high impact work, as outlined in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.

In addition to the fact that most respondents addressed the difficulties and inefficiencies of state funding, some organisations (13%) asserted that they sought to sustain their organisations on their own rather than depending on external support. This group shed light on different organisational management practices, such as business strategic management knowledge to sustain its organisation and balancing a marketing approach to maintain the artistic quality of production and audience needs. They observe business models with their own capital investment but using what Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2019) calls an audience-led vision-focus approach. They challenged themselves to co-exist with a Buddhist ideology of self-salvation. This group seems to be progressive organisations, but this phenomenon can also be interpreted as a failure of state support for artists under their care.

To sum up, the findings discussion in this Section 6.2 answer RQ 3⁴⁵, RSQ 3.1⁴⁶. This will be followed up by a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of foreign funding in the next Section 6.3, which addresses RSQ 3.2⁴⁷.

6.3 Debates on the benefits and drawbacks of international funding for Thai contemporary performing artists and their audiences

Most performing arts organisations agree that receiving financial support from foreign agencies benefits their organisations. International agencies often have a broader vision than the Thai government about cultural issues and are more straightforward about supporting artists that fit their criteria. Therefore, it is often easier for Thai organisations to receive external funding support, and their application process is not complicated compared to Thai state offices. Additionally, foreign grants are more flexible in practice as international agencies give artists freedom. Informants discussed the professional operation and arm's-length relationship of foreign funding agencies while criticising the OCAC's officials for their inability to connect with Thai artists. In contrast to the uncomfortable relationship with Thai state authorities, they receive due treatment and respect as valuable artists from international agencies. Besides, many Thai cutting-edge productions nowadays emerge through the support from foreign agencies to launch at overseas festivals. Surprisingly, when those productions came to be presented in Thailand, they were often supported by private partners, not the Thai government. These cases demonstrate that the Thai state is unconcerned about providing essential assistance for those potential performances, specifically non-mainstream Thai

⁴⁵ RQ 3: What actually are the existing models of financial support for the arts in Thailand, and how do they affect performing artists and their audiences?

⁴⁶ RSQ 3.1: To what extent does the government's view on Thainess affect its funding and support for contemporary performing arts?

⁴⁷ RSQ 3.2: How does international funding play a role in developing audiences for the contemporary performing arts in Thailand?

contemporary performing arts. It is apparent that non-mainstream Thai contemporary theatres are invisible from the Thai government's perspective.

Foreign support benefits the performing arts organisations and artists and helps to enrich audiences. It is a great opportunity for Thai audiences to experience wonderful productions by globally renowned artists. Remarkably, there is a limitation to the range of countries from which the festival can receive funding to support cultural activities in Thailand. It might be difficult for some countries that do not provide funding support in Thailand or whose culture is not included in their foreign affairs policies in Thailand.

However, while many informants agreed that these foreign grants have numerous advantages, some pointed out that the Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector must also take some basic precautions by securing domestic funding resources. As those international agencies are not responsible for Thai artists, it is not sustainable for Thai artists in the long term. If they change their policies, it will impact artists who depend on those foreign grants.

In addition, receiving international grants comes with conditions. Thai artists are still inferior to foreign artists because of the money from foreign organisations. Some informants proposed an ideal solution: the Thai government can take proactive action by providing matching funds and subsidising partial cost. This will help to balance the role of Thai artists in their collaborative works with foreign artists. Unsurprisingly, it is difficult in real practice, as the Thai Ministry of Culture restricts the issue of political expression, namely criticism of elements of Thainess.

Despite the fact that foreign assistance is part of cultivating their soft power, it can be argued that these international agencies could directly and indirectly enhance Thai contemporary performing arts to thrive both in terms of artists' creation and audiences' development. This section signifies what contemporary performing artists would like to find in Thai government's authorities, not only the positive and supportive attitude in dealing with artists, but also progressive policy with proactive effort to actually enhance the artists' potentialities and creativities.

6.4 Thai audiences' perceptions of Thainess

This section examines the synthesis of Thai audiences' gaze towards Thainess based on participants' responses in focus groups' discussions and with their demographic data. Data of the informants' gazes on Thainess in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1 (B), are classified into three distinctive types: A-Conservative, B-Non-conservative and C-Hybrid. To illustrate the difference of each type, this study employs Stuart Hall's approach on how the viewer takes a position on decoding the narrative constructed by mass media (in Section 2.3.2) to analyse these informants' attitudes toward

Thainess. Hall classifies viewer's decoding position into three types: 1) dominant-hegemonic position, 2) oppositional position and 3) negotiated position. This research used this typology as a framework to categorise the audience's gaze towards Thainess as seen in the table below.

Table 12: The application of Hall's framework to classify types of audience's gazes towards Thainess

Hall's framework of viewer position on decrypting the narrative constructed by mass media (1999)	Types of gazes towards Thainess
1. Dominant – hegemonic position (Viewers who agree with the hegemonic viewpoint and conceive unquestionably on those dominating messages.)	Type A: <i>Conservative gaze</i>
2. Oppositional position (Viewers who conceive both explicit and implicative modulation provided by a narrative but decrypt the message in a universal opposite mode.)	Type B: <i>Non-conservative gaze</i>
3. Negotiated position (Viewers who can bargain on the meaning and rendition from the production and its dominant narration.)	Type C: <i>Hybrid gaze</i>

Type A is for an informant who has a *conservative gaze*, unquestionably believing in Thainess as presented by the government ideologies in standard Thai school textbooks or on mainstream Thai history. These ideologies mainly emphasise on the three pillars of the country: nationhood, religion (Buddhism) and monarchy. Luangaramsri additionally explains how these three pillars affect collective actions such as speaking Thai, being a Buddhist and revering the king which are 'often characterised as unique in its ethnic and cultural homogeneity' (2003, p.157). Thainess is also generally identified with Prince Damrong's 'the act of borrowing' (Harrison and Jackson, 2009, p. 335) and adaptation in Thailand. Furthermore, Thainess, believed to be the foundation of national arts and culture, generates admiration for Thai beauty which leads to the patriotism and pride of the nation (Sattayanurak, 2020) (see more in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1). That is; a Type A person with a conservative gaze is content under hegemonic norm or afraid to think differently. This fear among general Thais might be affected by Buddhist notion of merit (*bun*) and sin (*baab*) or the belief that Thais should always respect those above them in the social hierarchy. Therefore, this research employs Hall's dominant-hegemonic position concept as a critical framework to analyse Thai people perception on Thainess and identified type A attitude as *conservative gaze*.

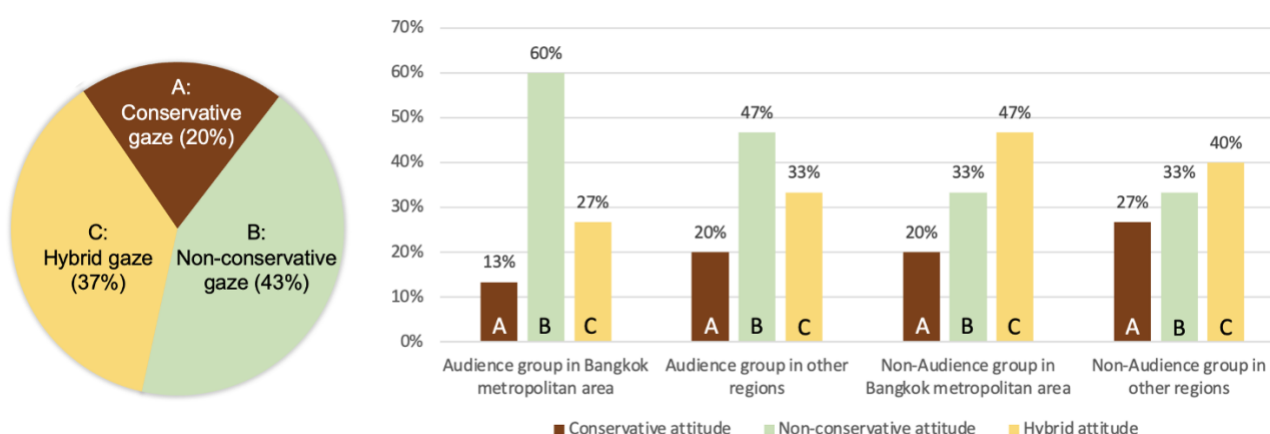
By contrast, those in Type B are participants who have a *non-conservative gaze* since they are able to critically consider Thainess outside of the contemporary expectations and norms of Thai society. They criticise the mainstream Thai history narrative and underlying concepts and do not see them as representing the whole or the right story of Thailand. They have critical minds and are not afraid to question what they think does not make sense, different from most Thai people who may normally

compromise and avoid questioning hegemonic norms. This Type B group explicitly thinks against the grain of the dominant hegemonic narrative as in Hall's oppositional position. Hence, this study classifies Type B attitude as a *non-conservative gaze*.

Finally, Type C participants look to negotiate and compromise, sitting between Hall's dominant-hegemonic position and the oppositional position. These informants work through the nuanced and socially grounded meanings of Thainess by believing some of the hegemonic narrative elements, like having a long and glorified ancient history but are also somewhat critical, knowing that Thainess should evolve and adjust to a changing environment. These Type C informants have a *hybrid gaze*.

The proportion of sampled informants classified into these three stances of gaze towards Thainess is summarised in the Figure 29 below.

Figure 29: Attitudes towards Thainess defined by each participant group



Extended from Figure 24 in Chapter 5, Section 5.1.1 (B), this Figure 29 illustrates types of gaze towards Thainess of each group analysed based on Hall's framework. As illustrated in the pie chart above, it is clear that most informants' gaze on Thainess tends to be progressive, including the groups with a non-conservative gaze (Type B) and a hybrid gaze (Type C), while a smaller group holds with a conservative gaze (Type A). The bar charts illustrate different pattern of data between the audience and non-audience groups. Surprisingly, Type A Conservative has the least proportion of informants in all clusters, both audience and non-audience and in all residential areas. While the audience group in all geographical areas share a corresponding pattern with that in the pie chart. The majority has a non-conservative gaze of Type B, most evidently in the audience group from the Bangkok Metropolitan area, followed by a Type C Hybrid gaze. On the contrary, the non-audience group has more participants with a Type C hybrid gaze, followed by a Type B Non-conservative gaze. This data pattern implies that the sampled informants are more likely to be critical and compromising on issues of Thainess, while those who have dominant-hegemonic position are in the

minority in all geographical areas. Surprisingly, the percentage of non-audiences in other regions who are assumed to have high proportion of a conservative gaze differs little from those with a conservative gaze in the non-audience group from the Bangkok Metropolitan area.

6.5 Thainess in Thai performing arts

Based on the synthesis of major historical records in Chapter 4, Thai theatre from ancient performing arts, from the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767) for example, was closely related to the hierarchy in society. Royal or high culture which belongs to the royal family, aristocrats and elites contrasted with populace culture or low culture belonging to the general public (Wongthed, 1999). During the era of absolute monarchy (before 1932), the arts and culture were generally explained and classified as a reference point or cultural preserve belonging to different classes in society. Royal culture aimed to bring various groups of people together while populace cultures 'maintain diversity for different groups in the society' (Wallipodom, 2001). The triangular socio-spatial relationships formed around three major centres of Siam society: *Ban* (Villages), *Wat* (Temple) and *Wang* (Palace), was also portrayed in a harmonious way. *Wat*, a synecdoche for Buddhism, plays a crucial role as an institution to nurture the morality in society and as a bridge between the monarch and commoners. The *Ban* and *Wang* had their own forms of performing arts or entertainments which were inter-related in terms of developments in arts and culture (Rutnin, 2012; Amatyakul, 2008).

Because courts kept written records, most of the historical records emphasised the performing arts in the royal court. Performances in the Ayutthaya period were staged to support the charismatic power of the king or *barami* in Thai (Pramoj, 1996). Dance-drama in the Ayutthaya period functioned as a political tool to support the monarchy and a sign of cultural power like Geertz's concept of the theatre state. Later on, in the Rattanakosin period, King Rama IV used the performing arts as political apparatuses to present Siam to the western powers as a kingdom with a rich heritage superior to its neighbours (Rutnin, 2012). The royal court was the centre where performing arts were developed and patronised. To avoid colonisation, wily Siamese kings were said to have adopted, adapted and selected good elements from western cultures (Rutnin, 2012 and Virulrak, 1999). King Rama V not only exported Thai performing arts and music to the British Empire as a kind of soft power, but he also imported some western theatre forms to Siam like the spoken plays. Many Thai theatre forms were invented by adapting western theatre and music conventions, for example, *lakhon dukdamban*, *lakhon phut salab lam* and hybrid creations of Thai *Pipat* ensembles and western classical ensembles, in the reigns of King Rama V and VI when these theatre and music forms were created in the court for royalty, aristocrats and elites. This practice of mixing western or *farang* convention with Thai convention was fashionable at the time.

In addition, the new state's hegemonic performing arts genre of Luang Wichitwatakarn in the first regime of Phibunsongkhram also employed *farang* or western performing arts conventions as a model to classify Thai theatre criteria. Patriotic drama with dramatic plots and emotional scripts were used to propagate national hegemonic ideologies. The adoption and modification of classical theatre forms, like *lakhon ram* mixed with modern music, everyday language dialogues and using proper period costumes rather than using classical costume (Rutnin, 2012) indicated the acceptance of civilised *farang* conventions among Thai leaders in the cultural realm. On the other hand, commercial or indigenous traditional theatres were strictly controlled because they resisted western classification and some were based on improvisation. Therefore, the state could not censor their scripts before the show. The narrative of Thai theatre history generally presents these differences of *farang*-influenced classical theatre forms and commercial or indigenous theatre forms with a polarising attitude which corresponds to what Jackson (2010) calls a 'dual gaze', as discussed early in this chapter. In this case, it reflects the 'outward gaze' when Thai leaders saw *farang* civilisation in their view, which also included an additional gaze of classical forms as having higher status than indigenous or popular forms, while the 'inward gaze' of a domineering look on local people is normally found in the official records. It is apparent that 'dual gaze' dichotomy is a way of looking by Thais who tend to polarise what they have seen or experienced.

Besides these results, the in-depth interview findings revealed that the typical notion of *farang* or western influence in traditional arts is challenged by a representative in the office of performing arts under the Fine Arts Department as he reflected on how *farang* thought or techniques had been implicitly employed to enhance the creative process of Thai traditional theatre, while the end products still seemed to be Thai traditional appearances. This finding suggests that the influence of *farang* might not need to be explicitly seen but can be implicitly utilised even in classical performing arts. It also reflects that the admiration of *farang* among Thai traditional artists may exist but remain unvoiced because of their position as representatives of the Thai classical arts, which pushes them to keep to official views.

Remarkably, these *farang* influenced forms of theatre created under absolute monarchy and under the state hegemony of Phibunsongkhram are now classified as a kind of Thai theatre or Thai traditional theatre in official records under the labels King Rama V theatre, King Rama VI theatre and Luang Wichitwatakarn's patriotic theatre.

6.6 Where are contemporary performing arts in Thai history?

This thesis has suggested that contemporary theatre in Thailand first emerged for educational purposes, in the establishment of Department of Dramatic Arts at Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn

University and Drama Department at Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University in the 1970s. These official starting points for teaching modern western theatre in Thailand helped usher in the teachers and performers constituting today's contemporary performing arts troupes by studying or working on projects with people tied to those programs that focused on western theatre practice in the universities. Therefore, Thai contemporary arts largely derived from Thailand's higher education institutions and the forms of social and cultural expression found there. While this helped to institutionalise a certain *farang* style in the Thai contemporary performing arts, the new programs did not systematically produce an archive of the work they did.

Contemporary performing arts could hardly find their place in the official Thai history, as the definition of Thai theatre or Thai performing arts are normally conceived of as Thai traditional performing arts, that is classical or state's standard forms, with few spaces for local or folk performances. As previously discussed in Chapter 4, the storyline of Thai history on arts and culture has focused on the narratives of traditional arts and culture. The emergence of new forms deriving from other cultures are normally identified as having elements of otherness. If those other derived forms were blended or modified through "Thai-isation", then they may be considered Thai. Thainess is a relative concept. When one encounters two forms that are considered Thai, one is likely to be perceived as more Thai in comparison to the other. Therefore, the definition of Thainess is constantly being re-evaluated. For example, King Rama VI translated and adapted many western plays to be produced in Thai context. If one considers the fact that the characters are speaking Thai in a Thai setting, it can be considered to be a Thai performance. From the historical perspective, these performances generally are categorised as western performances as they are spoken plays with western conventions and original stories from western playwrights.

Furthermore, the political theatre of Luang Wichitwatakarn in the regime of Field Marshal Phibulsongkram was created by adopting and adapting western techniques into Thai traditional forms. His political theatre integrated contents influenced by nationalistic ideologies of the state at that time and they were considered western-influenced forms which could not represent Thainess as much as traditional forms. Luang Wichitwatakarn's political theatre ended in the next government as traditional performing arts were restored to prestige as part of Thailand's national heritage.

Many early productions of Thai contemporary performing arts made by those trained in western theatre techniques often within university dramatic arts departments used translated western plays, e.g., classical Greek plays, English plays and modern American plays, that were performed for Thai audiences. The training system for performers followed modern western techniques, particularly Stanislavski's actor training system which was used not only in university acting classes for theatre students but also used to train professional performers in the TV and film industries by university lecturers. Some theatre graduates started their own commercial theatre companies, like Monthien

Thong Theatre which performed in a hotel lounge in the 1980s and the Bangkok Playhouse by Dass Entertainment which produced both theatre performances and TV programmes in 1990s.

Alongside the growth of contemporary performing arts in universities and for entertainment businesses, contemporary performing arts also play a crucial role in the social and political arenas as a medium for activists and intellectuals to give voice to social and political issues. Among early examples of these are the Crescent Moon theatre troupe and Theatre 28, followed later by the emergence of mobile theatre troupes for social change and development in the 1980s-1990s like Makhampom, MAYA: the art and cultural institute for development, and Krajidrid. Mobile theatre groups reached out to many groups and many areas of Thailand. As these mobile theatre troupes needed to convey a message to the local public, some integrated some more traditional Thai elements, like dance or local popular traditional theatre techniques from *likay* for example, into their western techniques of storytelling or presentation, because the general public in local or rural areas were more familiar with these traditional forms than those from western countries. While western theatre training in some universities, such as Thammasat University, also included Thai theatre training such as Thai dance practice, as well as Thai dance masters from the government's School of Fine Arts who were invited to train students in the classical standard.

Based on the account of contemporary performing arts synthesised from historical information in Chapter 4 and Section 1.3 of the Introduction Chapter, and in response to RQ 1⁴⁸ and RSQ 1.1⁴⁹, this study argues that contemporary performing arts in Thailand started to mix or blend elements of traditional theatre conventions into their forms after the emergence of modern western theatre started to be taught in universities. That is, when considering the key transition or linkage between traditional and contemporary Thai performing arts, it is best to see contemporary theatre in Thailand as emerging from different sources, using different practices for different purposes, rather than Thai classical or traditional theatre. These findings partially respond to RQ 1 that western education might make contemporary performing arts diverge from the system in the transition to modern Thai society, due to the fact that contemporary performing arts are part of a new western-influenced genre and in a different context than Thai traditional forms. In other words, from the beginning, Thai contemporary performing artists were trained in modern western conventions in universities, not in government traditional arts schools. Within half a century of its development from its university base, modern western theatre has ramified into a complex field of Thai contemporary performing arts and artists who have been gradually blending and connecting themselves with Thai society as well as with international artists, methods, and styles. The resulting remarkable blend of Thai traditional theatre

⁴⁸ RQ 1: What are the key relationships between traditional and contemporary Thai performing arts and how have shifts in these relationships affected the place of contemporary performing arts and its audiences in Thailand?

⁴⁹ RSQ 1.1: How have differences between old forms and new forms of performance been encountered or interacted with and how do these interactions affect audiences?

and Thai contemporary performing arts seems to present difficulties for some kinds of contemporary theatre forms or contents, like trying to mix oil with water and it is often hard to smoothly blend them together. When considering the mode of typical representations of Thainess, it seems that Thai contemporary performing arts are mostly invisible and therefore easy to ignore for the Thai government, since its primary focus is on classical traditional performing arts in Thailand's cultural heritage.

6.7 Thainess in Contemporary performing arts from all stakeholders' view

Regarding the gaze on Thainess in the Thai contemporary performing arts, the significant findings are classified and analysed into 3 distinct perspectives: 1) audience's perception, 2) artist and performing arts organisation's view including theatre critics, theatre promotion companies and foundations and 3) government standpoint. This section clarifies and answers parts of RQ 2⁵⁰, RSQ 2.1⁵¹ and RSQ 2.3⁵². Additionally, the discussion related to RSQ 2.2 is clarified in the last paragraph of Sub-section 6.7.1.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand the different layers of the gaze that each group of performing arts stakeholders holds. At first, all stakeholders are Thai, they form 'diffused audiences' in the contemporary mediascape (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). They can be media consumers and content creators at the same time (Burzyńska, 2016). The condition of diffused audiences forms Thai people's own gaze as filtering eyes (Sartre, 1943; Foucault, 1975; Schroeder, 1998) towards Thainess.

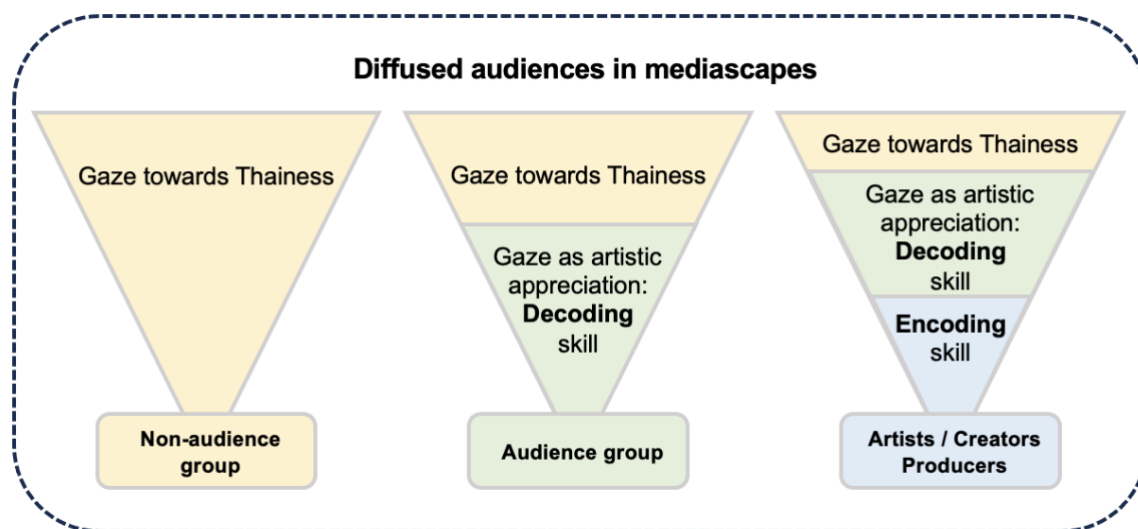
The audience group has another layer of gaze in contemporary performing arts appreciation as a learned skill set for decoding the meaning in performing arts work (Bourdieu, 1993; Reinhardt, 2022; Maitland, n.d.), but the non-audience group generally does not have this layer with a gaze to appreciate the contemporary arts. The contemporary performing artists, contemporary performing arts organisations, theatre promotion companies, theatre critics and foundations all have the same basic gazes as the audience group plus another layer of a gaze as a creator or producer, which is a skill to encode the meanings in their created or produced performing arts works (see Figure 30).

⁵⁰ RQ 2: How does the notion of 'Thainess' or national identity challenge contemporary performing artists and affect audiences' decisions about attending this type of performance?

⁵¹ RSQ 2.1: How do contemporary performing artists and their audiences perceive the notion of Thainess, especially in relation to the contemporary performing arts?

⁵² RSQ 2.3: To what extent do Thai audiences' perceptions of Thainess in contemporary performing arts differ from those of performing artists and the government?

Figure 30: Different layers of the gaze in each non-mainstream performing arts' stakeholders



6.7.1 Audience perception about Thainess in Thai contemporary performing arts

Findings from the focus group informants' opinions are analysed to show contrasting conditions of their experiences, i.e., the audience's view and the non-audience's view. These two different experiences signify a different level on artistic appreciation in performing arts. The audience group has practiced and learned this way of looking, interacting, appreciating and understanding the artist's encoded meanings in works of contemporary performing arts (Bourdieu, 1993; Reinhardt, 2022; Maitland, n.d.) while the non-audience group lacks basic practice or even experience in an artistic appreciation of the performing arts. Moreover, as all participants are Thais, they also hold another layer of a gaze as the filtering eyes on Thainess. The findings from each group will be examined below before bringing both groups together in the interpretation of what the findings signify.

From the audience's perspectives, there are five key issues regarding Thai contemporary performing arts:

- 1) If those artists are born and/or raised in a Thai context, their works should represent Thainess in some way.
- 2) In contemporary performance, Thainess is more ingrained in the artist's message, i.e., content, rather than in its ostentatious form.
- 3) Instead of focusing on the dichotomy of ancient forms and new influences, embrace contemporaneity to explain or complement what is seen.
- 4) Universality is a characteristic of contemporary performing arts.
- 5) Some audience members paradoxically remarked that Thainess should be recognisable at first sight.

Audience group members seem to hold progressive views on Thainess, given the viewpoints they shared. When considering the above findings across the participants' age groups, all age groups agreed with issues 1 to 4 from all areas of residence. Remarkably, issue no. 5 was mostly discussed by the audience group members aged 40 and over in both Bangkok Metropolitan Area and other regions. This suggests that some older audience members hold a hybrid position and are negotiating between old and new influences on Thainess. It also signifies that the gaze of some elderly audiences quickly assess an art work's relationship to Thainess.

By contrast, since the non-audience respondents have little experience with the contemporary performing arts, their perspectives on Thainess often emerge unconsciously when comparing different styles of performance. They responded by immediately ranking the degree of Thainess for each type of performance, seeing, for instance *khon* as representing the highest degree of Thainess compared to the local form of *mohlam* and foreign-influenced contemporary performances.

Non-audience members raised two further questionable comments about the degree of Thainess in a local performance, *mohlam*. The character of each local or folk performance has a distinct origin which hints at shades of Thainess on its own. But relying only on specific locations does not adequately reflect the entire country. In addition, the adaptability or openness of local or folk performances to contemporary influences to suit their audiences through time may diminish the degree of Thainess of modern-day *mohlam* performances. These discussions of non-audience members demonstrate their attitude and response to the various shades of Thainess in the Thai traditional and local performances with which they appear to be more familiar. Contemporary performing arts, on the contrary, are controversial in how they relate to Thainess. These views seem to suggest that of those who have not had an experience watching contemporary performing arts. Therefore, their considerations start by comparing each type of performance and evaluating its degree of Thainess. Surprisingly, these findings illustrate the distinctive reactions of the non-audience group, which benefits this study. It shows the spontaneous and unconscious interpretations of people outside the arts world who are somewhat resistant to art works outside the scope of their formative or referencing experiences. In the context of this study, if the policy makers or politicians are non-audience, they will likely respond in a similar way when considering the degree of Thainess in contemporary performing arts as the non-audience group. Furthermore, it seems clear that the issue of western or foreign impact on contemporaneity influences the perception of non-audience members when they respond to Thai contemporary performances.

To elaborate, in response to RSQ 2.2⁵³, the reasons to attend a performing arts event, participants' curiosity or interests is a crucial motivation for what they do next, such as finding more information, inviting friends, or booking a ticket (see Section 5.1.1 (E) in Chapter 5). However, the notion of Thainess does not affect decisions of anyone in the audience group, while those informants who indicated that typical Thainess campaigns positively affect their decisions are exclusively from the non-audience group. Such findings suggest that a part of the non-audience agrees with the messages from the government on the state's ideology of Thainess, and it is able to motivate them to action, such as buying tickets to support classical performances with love and pride. Most of the audience group and some non-audience members are somewhat critical in their decision making. In the case Thai classical performances, government campaigns or public promotions are not only unable to attract their attention, but typical patriotic messages move them to resist and to question whether it is a duty of Thais to support those national arts. This phenomenon indicates that this group considers how a performance can fulfil their aesthetic or social needs as a human being, not as a Thai person who is subject to political influence. These findings indicate that the performing arts audience tends to hold a progressive attitude not influenced by government campaigns linking the performing arts to Thainess.

6.7.2 The creator's gaze: Contemporary performing arts organisations, artists and non-governmental stakeholders

In discussing Thainess in contemporary performing arts, most of this group asserted that Thainess is defined by two criteria: content and form, but they recognise that the term 'contemporary' is difficult to explain or for the public to understand. Nevertheless, this group of interviewees argued about how they identify the contemporary performing arts – it does not only include non-traditional or newly created works, but also a diversity of forms. The crucial point for them in terms of contemporaneity in those works is their function in the present time. This means that contemporaneity and tradition are not separate but also often intertwined. Some contemporary performances reinterpret, apply, or modify classical forms. Traditional works that are still performed today should be also included here. There are two further striking features that differentiate contemporary works from traditional ones: 1) contemporary works often advocate for social equality since its content can tell anyone's and everyone's story, not only stories of glorious royal epics or leaders; and 2) contemporary works must look ahead and prepare audiences for the future.

⁵³ RSQ 2.2: How do perceptions of Thainess in contemporary performing arts affect decision-making about attending contemporary or traditional performing arts events?

6.7.3 The Government's standpoint

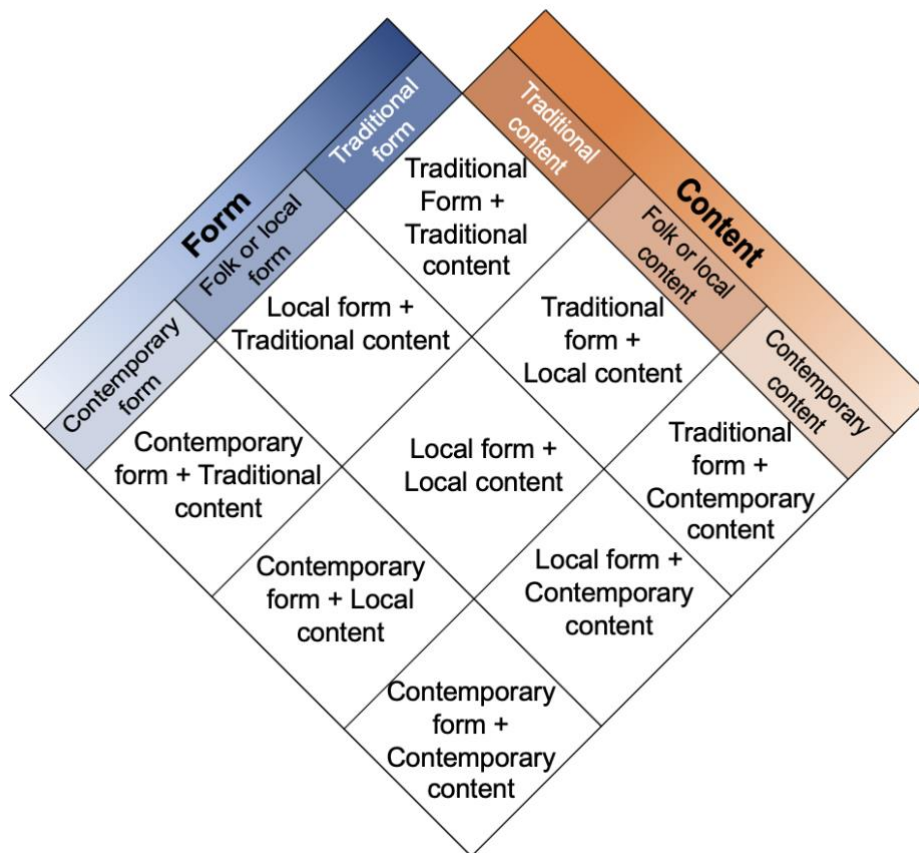
The OCAC and CEA data were previously discussed with document findings in Section 6.2 and the interview data from Office of Performing Arts was discussed in Section 6.5. These three distinctive governmental offices' attitudes signify that the CEA economic-oriented perspective sees Thainess as negotiable in all performing arts forms or contents, provided those works can be marketed and bring the money to the country. For the Fine Arts Department that aims to preserve traditional performances, traditional artists need to tacitly adjust themselves to *farang* or foreign influenced techniques that may appear in Thai traditional forms. This echoes the process whereby traditional artists negotiate the meaning between Thainess and *farang*-ness when they are creating Thai traditional performing arts. The OCAC, meanwhile, ostensibly has direct responsibility for promoting contemporary performing arts, but faces a dilemma since it also needs to follow state priorities which require that its officers unquestioningly consent on government's ideologies. Therefore, while many OCAC personnel may understand the essence of contemporaneity and how to support the contemporary performing arts in Thailand, their official duties prevent them from acting on this understanding. They are kept from fostering the Thai contemporary performing arts because what they can do is framed by the country's ideological framing of three pillars – nation, religion, King – supporting Thainess.

6.8 The matrix of considering Thainess in contemporary performing arts

This study used the findings of in-depth interviews and focus groups to gather their opinions on Thainess in the contemporary performing arts and presented the results in a modified 2x2 Ansoff Matrix analysis framework (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2019) by expanding it to 3x3 matrix to illustrate the full range of Thainess in the contemporary performing arts.

In the matrix chart, informants generally considered the contemporary performing arts by their *form* (as a tangible and provable by sight) and *content* (as an intangible but need more time and process to verify). This study related the form and content features to an X axis (form) and Y axis (content) but did not differentiate them as a regular vertical or horizontal axis, to highlight the balance between form and content. These form and content elements are divided into three types of performing arts discussed in this study; namely, traditional, folk or local and contemporary. Therefore, the chart is presented as a diamond matrix mix which has an apex and a bottom as illustrated in Figure 31 below.

Figure 31: The matrix of Thainess in contemporary performing arts (ideal illustration)



Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the results of differences between the public perspectives and non-mainstream contemporary performing arts stakeholders' perspectives in the spectrum of Thainess in contemporary performing arts above were drawn from individual thoughts of each informant. While the notion of Thainess is complex, when this study considered this diamond matrix mix together with the findings from the document research, including the discussion of historical narratives and cultural policy situations, the realistic spectrum in the perception of Thainess in Thai contemporary performing arts is presented in Figure 32.

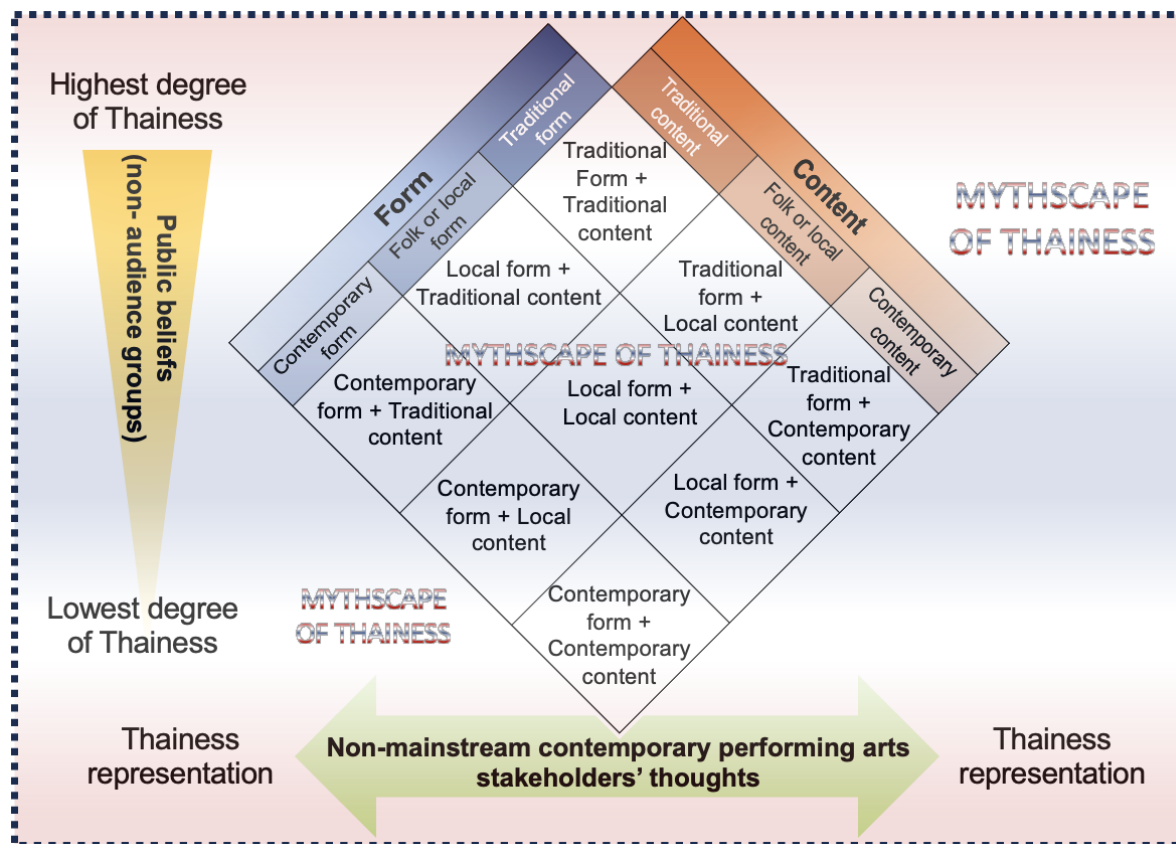
As discussed above in Section 6.2, all three periods of Thai nationalism identified in this thesis illustrate how leaders imagined Siamese or Thai communities. Although the leaders of each period created different types of practices for their nationalism, the main style of each community was imagined (Anderson, 2006). In the case of Thailand, the imagined style is based on faith in Buddhism and loyalty to the king, and by being intrinsically 'limited and sovereign' in Anderson's term (2006, p. 6). Such imagination has served the political wellbeing of the state rather than the welfare of the people (ibid.).

Governments have thus utilised Thainess as an ideological tool to help legitimate themselves with the people by disseminating and manipulating it to achieve a dominant position. This imagined Thai community is portrayed as 'a community worthy of sacrifice' (Breuilly, 1999, p. 159). Cultural identity is here a key representation of the nation, so national culture needs to be protected to glorify Thai sovereignty. The Thai classical performing arts are central to official Thai history and form the mainstream history of Thailand. Thai traditional theatre forms focus on honouring past kings and their contributions to the country. Furthermore, these Thai classical theatre forms are always presented as key embodiments of Thainess in the Thai state's view (Jungwiwattanaporn, 2010). Anderson's concept helps to illustrate and reaffirm how Thai leaders have been exercising their views of Thainess in all periods and how it affects the contemporary performing arts. The policy analysis of this appears in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.6-4.2.10 and the discussion in Section 6.2 of this chapter.

These findings suggest that understanding Thainess in the Thai contemporary performing arts needs to see Thainess as a myth or set of beliefs correlating to Bell (2003), Appadurai (1999) and Rojas (2013)'s ideas of mythscape in nationalism. 'Thainess is never clearly defined, it is supposed that every Thai knows it is there' (Winichakul, 1994, p.5) and Pramoj attributes Thainess to what is found in the Thai people (Commission for National Identity, 1985 cited in Winichakul, 1994). Besides identifying Thainess, Thais also define what is un-Thai by a 'negative identification' (Winichakul, 1994). But Thais identified other foreigners long before their engagements with those from the west (Sivaraksa, 2002). This study emphasises the influence of *farang* in particular as they played a crucial role in national identification since the mid-nineteenth century and attitudes towards a *farang* menace had roots in Thai perceptions (Chachavalpongpon, 2005).

Document research found various perspectives in the historical records and suggests that the national narratives depend on the author of the story or the power, a view corresponding to Kasetsiri's analysis and discussion of official mainstream Thai history texts (2016). The ideology of Thainess generally emerges from the Thai state who has been encouraging Thai people to believe that it is authentic and real since Thai people also need to identify who they are as Thais. This historical narrative seems a fitting choice for Thai people to explicitly present who they are, and state ideology has continually diffused it into Thai people's way of life.

Figure 32: The matrix of Thainess in relation to the contemporary performing arts (realistic illustration)



The diamond matrix mix in Figure 32 above present public views of the performing arts by evaluating their degree of Thainess on a vertical scale as shown on the left yellow vertical tab. The highest degree of Thainess is represented on the top of this matrix, with a performance containing a range of traditional forms and content, while the other matrix mixes represent Thainess on a pro rata basis. Unsurprisingly, performances that are both contemporary in form and content are on the bottom of this diamond matrix. They are assigned the lowest degree of Thainess by the non-audience group.

By contrast, non-mainstream contemporary performing arts' stakeholders are considered to have a more fluid view of Thainess due to their focus more on content than on form. They agree that all mixes in the matrix may represent Thainess (the degree does not matter), a view that differs from the non-audience group as shown on the horizontal green tab of the Figure 32. The bottom spectrum of performances with contemporary form and content is a centrepiece of discussion among the audience group and artists as they are easily evaluated as non-Thai. Nonetheless, Thainess may also be believed to be embedded in the ideas, thoughts, ideology, creativity of artists who have been nurtured in Thai society and who encode these meanings in their work. Regardless of the forms of presentation, Thainess can be represented through artists' messages or performance contents. A good example of how a performance with contemporary form and content helps clarify Thainess is

a Thai artist's drag show with lip-synched English songs to convey her troubled life story as a drag in Thai society that an audience mentioned in a focus group above.

The non-mainstream performing arts stakeholders of this study include three representatives from three government agencies. They were chosen for their personal answers (individual level) about Thainess in the contemporary performing arts outside of their official work. They emphasised what they genuinely think on this issue, even though in terms of their day-to-day work practice they need to follow the state's political ideology, which might differ from their personally views.

Nevertheless, from the interviews, it is apparent that no one can judge or evaluate which narrative on Thainess is right or wrong. Therefore, they personally evaluate Thainess from their own experiences, and sometimes Thainess is situated or adapted in a globalised context to serve their desire for aesthetic or spiritual fulfilment and product consumption in everyday life. This finding correlates to what Reynold calls 'Siamization of capitalism' (2002, p. 309) which can also be seen in contemporary commercialisation of Thai Buddhist objects and practices to serve as a mass belief that ritual ceremonies will bring them happiness and material wealth (ibid.). Moreover, Thailand's globalised economy and consumerist society has created what Kasian Tejapira calls 'double identities' (2015, p. 132) in Thai consumers who see exchange value in foreign products or brands and repay their psychological action of being un-Thai. Thais who consume global products, in short, also need to relate to some way of being Thai. He calls this process 'the psychological sublimation of un-Thainess' (2001, pp. 161-162). In an era of globalised consumption, Thai consumers have found a way to adjust to un-Thainess and remain Thai. He likens this phenomenon to the chemical process of sublimation, where Thainess can vaporise from a solid and material state of Thainess to one that exists in a psychic or spiritual realm from which it can be re-materialised through signs of Thainess. The interview findings of this study illustrate that all informants are familiar with managing the Thainess / un-Thainess boundary in their daily consumption practices. Therefore, Thainess in Thai contemporary performing arts from the viewpoint of non-mainstream contemporary performing arts stakeholders can be conceptualised as a mode of subjectification, spiritualisation and interiorisation which appears in the content rather than the form of performance. Nonetheless, Thainess as seen in contemporary performing arts can be fragmentary, vaporised and then sublimated through processes of negotiation into any form. In the globalised world of Thai economic life, the economic or consumption activities seem to be free and easily negotiated with the state's ideology of Thainess, provided this negotiation can generate economic value to the country. This phenomenon helps clarify the broad and inclusive attitude of the Thai government official from the CEA, as non-mainstream performing stakeholders indicated in the findings, and the contrasting view of cultural safeguarding stressed by staff of the Ministry of Culture.

6.9 The phenomenon of unofficial existence of non-mainstream contemporary performing artists

The above discussion of the mythscape of Thainess, together with the in-depth interview findings, show that the myth of Thainess influences negotiations between the government and non-mainstream contemporary performing artists or organisations. The state's ideology of Thainess, particularly that in the Ministry of Culture, with its prescribed and limited meanings, inadvertently obstruct the accessibility from contemporary performing artists or organisations who have opposed the contemporary concept of Thainess. It means that the negotiation process of Thainess as imagined identities seem impossible to actually realise in practice. Though state officials may personally understand the globalised situation in which arts and culture of Thailand need to adjust themselves, the government's mechanisms, the system and policies for which the state ideology of Thainess appears to be a key issue in its political function, have been controlling their operations. This limits the artist's freedom of expression to only conveying positive sides of the country's three pillars or to respectfully express their contemporary creativity in ways that are not critical. Moreover, some state mechanisms seem to have been created to obstruct the work of contemporary artists and to erode their creative capabilities.

The rare support from private or corporate sponsorship in Thailand is difficult, since tax incentives or deductions for private or corporate companies to support arts are largely unavailable in Thailand (IDI-01, IDI-13). Astonishingly, only five types of funds under the Ministry of Culture qualify donors for income tax deduction (IDI-08) as one key informant noted. This obstacle to private sector supports also show how the myth of Thainess shapes Thai government policy. The Thai state manipulates their artists and controls all significant resources such as funds and facilities, so that only obedient performing artists who abide by state political ideology or attitudes can receive public funds. Artists are concerned about government inefficiencies and their non-transparent selection processes for grantees and facilities. Therefore, this study argues that the imaginations formed by this mythscape of Thainess affords the Thai state to create difficulties and barriers rather than advantages and supports for non-mainstream contemporary performing artists or organisations.

The clashing ideologies held by the state and contemporary artists has led non-mainstream contemporary performing artists or organisations to avoid attempts to seek state support and even to fit into the state system as Thai Theatre Foundation argues in Section 1.1 of the Introduction. The official registration as a company causes more trouble and expense than benefits. Collaborating with the state generates more difficulties than receiving outside support, so many endeavour to exist outside the state system. Findings suggest that the burdens posed by the government turn many contemporary arts organisations away from state support and they rather seek survival on their own

terms, even though they pay personal income tax annually and expect some state support. Most contemporary performing arts organisations agree on the inefficiencies of the state funding support system, and some organisations stated clearly that they do not care about the government support and try to live on their own, arguing that this shows the failure of Thai government to administrate and care for artists who are also taxpayers. One interviewee said: 'It is important that my company is self-sustainable first, without support from others. Once it survives, other state's supports will come automatically' (IDI-15, p.7). This reflects how the Thai state lacks any plan to nurture artists long-term but prefer to pick up ready-trained artists. While it is arguable that the government lacks funding for long-term investments to nurture artists and to wait for an uncertain result, it may be willing to spend small amounts on renowned artists who can produce a successful performance. This brings up the question of whether the government should take this risk in administering public funds by seeking to incubate artists instead of leaving all risks to artists themselves.

Foreign funding would seem to be a boon for non-mainstream contemporary performing artists or organisations. Performing artists often see foreign sponsors as possessing more support mechanisms and more opportunities for free expression than the Thai state offers, as discussed in Section 5.3 of Chapter 5. Although many performing arts groups in Thailand are concerned about sustainability, given that international funds depend on countries' changing foreign funding policies in arts and culture, many Thai performing artists agreed that foreign funds can help them make their way as independent artists outside of a generally unsupportive Thai state. International funding also often helps Thai contemporary performing artists to create work where they can freely express themselves. This freedom from the state ideology is a distinctive management feature for Thai non-mainstream performing artists who seek maintain their freedom of expression and creation as not receiving funding support from the state means they are free from the government's control. Even though in some cases the government tries to censor their performances, artists' creativity in using physical expression other than spoken words is far beyond the state officials' understanding. On the one hand, this case seems to be an advantage, in that the barriers created by the state help strengthen artists in exercising their creativity of expression. On the other hand, this also echoes a disappointing situation that public funds fail to be fairly distributed to all contemporary performing artists. Furthermore, the situation that only some kinds of performance are supported by the state illustrates the unfair administration of state welfare for the public who have rights to know or experience the other kinds of performance beyond the control of the Thai state.

6.10 From the difficulties of contemporary performing artists to the invisibility of its audience

The lack of official recognition in state policy of non-mainstream performing artists in Thailand has created some resistance among performing artists toward the state and helped to widen the gap between them. Since non-mainstream performing artists are often invisible in the official system, some basic supports for Thai citizens with a career in contemporary performing arts are also missing. During the COVID-19 pandemic, although the government announced special grants to support professions in media and entertainment, non-mainstream contemporary performing artists were not included in the scheme since there was no data on them in the state system. A representative from Thai Theatre Foundation (IDI-13) had to contact the OCAC to double check and ask that non-mainstream artists be included in the support scheme. This unofficial existence of non-mainstream performing arts sector is also missing in Thai mainstream historical records that refer only to classical or traditional forms and some standard local forms since they represent the state ideology of Thainess.

Discussions of findings in this chapter suggest various historical and institutional causes that have led to the invisibility of Thai contemporary performing arts' audiences. One basic reason that makes sense to the state is that because non-mainstream contemporary performing artists are invisible in the official system, so their audiences would be missing, too. Yet the invisibilities of both the non-mainstream contemporary performing artists and their audiences are tied to many other possible underlying causes. Non-mainstream contemporary performing artists from Thailand are often visible on global stages, but the Thai government does not include them as part of its mission because many of these contemporary performing arts projects focus on work that are at odds with the focus of national cultural policy and political ideology. This suggests that Thai politics plays a crucial role in shaping what is happening in Thai culture and the arts nowadays. Since the state strictly demands compliance of its people to its hegemonic ideology, some arts groups may choose to avoid or resist it so that they can do their creative work as they see fit. The findings from both document analysis and interviews data strongly suggest that this artistic resistance in Thailand stems from groups seeking to survive through practices of self-sufficiency and self-salvation that may liberate them from state ideology.

Nevertheless, as non-mainstream performing artists shift toward liberating themselves from state ideology, they face a tough road for themselves. They do not focus on commercial profit but rather on creating meaningful performances for the public given their limited budget. This idealistic attitude was discussed earlier, in Chapter 4 and Section 1.3 of the Introduction. It stems from the historical evolution of Thai contemporary performing arts groups in universities and through interactions with

foreign personnel, practices and examples, which led most of them to emphasise social rather than commercial values. Moreover, most are part of artist-run organisations, so their troupes are run with an artistic production focus rather than a managerial focus and are deeply reluctant to using arts marketing in their organisations (Thamkulangkool, 2020). For decades, therefore, most Thai non-mainstream contemporary theatre troupes work under tight budgets, with limited resources and facilities, and aim for social or aesthetic values.

The Thai government shift of its policies toward the creative economy may seem to offer some hope for non-mainstream contemporary performing artists, and, although the CEA has inclusive and progressive vision, its focus on economic outcomes and impact is a huge barrier for non-mainstream contemporary performing artists. Most non-mainstream artists run all performance processes by themselves with no state mechanism or regular corporate support to help develop their work to become something that has both artistic quality and strong economic value. Moreover, each state agency focuses only on its own institutional space and mission, with no real communication, much less coordination, with other agencies. In other words, since there has been no industrial scale investment in Thai non-mainstream performing arts, how can they become a creative industry capable of producing creative products that contribute to creative economy? This question leads to a more profound question about the lack of systematic thinking about how creativity requires an infrastructure or ecosystem to support and nurture it which the Thai government could provide. By focusing on policies that stress only on commercial or political values and mostly ignore social or aesthetic values, the Thai state shows its lack of understanding on the coexisting relationships between mainstream (or commercial) and non-mainstream sectors in the arts industry. The two sectors should enhance each other through their interaction in a creative ecology as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5. Experimental works of non-mainstream artists are like testing products from theatre labs, while the commercial sector selects and promotes some already tested products to be developed and re-produced on a larger scale into the bigger performing arts markets. This cycle of development and process is something the government should support, investing public funds to foster the non-mainstream arts sector. The outcome of this investment would be creative products that have potentiality to the market and to drive the country's economy. The subsidised experimental productions could also be essential in terms of audience development. It can be a chance to outreach new and broader group of audiences as it is their right, as taxpayers, to feel a sense of ownership. This echoes a major gap in creative economy policy in Thailand in terms of lacking the investment on incubation and experiment of promising artists' works which need time and money to keep consistent in nurturing excellent works. It also shows why Thai non-mainstream performing artists still must work harder to become potential creators when seeking to fulfil economic indicators in their evaluation.

Performing artists in Thailand thus face a dilemma. They need to both focus on their creative artistic work to ensure their organisation's survival and to fill in the lack of tools, experiences, know-how and recognition that help them fit into Thailand's creative economy policies. This dilemma affects their creative work and their administration, especially given their tight budgets. A particular result of this dilemma is that these groups cannot spend their limited budgets on developing their audiences. Instead, they can only maintain their current available audiences as far as they can by their own effort. The difficult situation faced by these non-mainstream contemporary performing artists has changed very little from what their predecessors faced decades ago, helping to ensure that the issue of audience development remains invisible in Thailand in terms of practice and at the policy level.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This concluding chapter first summarises the main results of this thesis. This section is organised to clarify each research question. Then discusses its research contributions, implications for policy and practice, limitations, and finish with a few suggestions for future research.

7.1 Research summary

Chapter 2 synthesises the international know-how of audience development for the performing arts. It discovers that the reviewed audience development strategies often used seem inappropriate for the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector in Thailand. The key mismatch is due to the constraints that separate Thai theatre audiences from the Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector. Identifying and understanding how these basic constraints create that separation is essential before seeking to develop audiences for this arts sector. This requires examining and discussing the historical development of the constraints and problems – many of which have not been studied and therefore remain hidden – in the Thai arts and culture, investigating currently existing problems, key factors and hurdles in Thailand's arts and culture from the past that affect the development of Thai contemporary performing arts audiences who most researchers, policy-makers and practitioners treat as invisible. To accomplish these research goals, several research questions and sub-questions (shown below) were identified as the guiding queries for this investigation.

Research questions

RQ 1: What are the key relationships between traditional and contemporary Thai performing arts and how have shifts in these relationships affected the place of contemporary performing arts and its audiences in Thailand?

RSQ 1.1 How have differences between old forms and new forms of performance been encountered or interacted with and how do these interactions affect audiences?

RQ 2: How does the notion of 'Thainess' or national identity challenge contemporary performing artists and affect audiences' decisions about attending this type of performance?

RSQ 2.1 How do contemporary performing artists and their audiences perceive the notion of Thainess, especially in relation to the contemporary performing arts?

RSQ 2.2 How do perceptions of Thainess in contemporary performing arts affect decision-making about attending contemporary or traditional performing arts events?

RSQ 2.3 To what extent do Thai audiences' perceptions of Thainess in contemporary performing arts differ from those of performing artists and the government?

RQ 3: What actually are the existing models of financial support for the arts in Thailand, and how do they affect performing artists and their audiences?

RSQ 3.1 To what extent does the government's view on Thainess affect its funding and support for contemporary performing arts?

RSQ 3.2 How does international funding play a role in developing audiences for the contemporary performing arts in Thailand?

Understanding the ambivalent relationship of Thainess and *farang*-ness is key to understanding the contemporary performing arts in Thailand. Historically, Siamese leaders' views of the Thainess-*farang* relationship affected their gaze, which in turn shaped what they saw and felt. A psychic tension recurred from the later 19th century to the early 20th century as Siamese kings admired *farang* as the bearers and makers of modern civilisation with a favourable 'outward gaze' and simultaneously saw *farang* as a potential threat to a Siamese political wholeness and cultural identity as they sought recognition from *farang* as a modern civilised country. Findings discussion in Section 6.1 shows how the literature on Thainess and nationalism in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.1 help to build on an argument that the place of Thainess in the contemporary sphere always implies some *farang* influence. This is a reminder that the ongoing fascination and fear of *farang* by Thais continues to produce a reconfiguring, hybridising and negotiating the contemporary value of Thainess. The longstanding power dynamic of the *farang* not only challenges but also generates a unique gaze towards Thainess for Siamese/Thai leaders to continually redefine and recreate themselves.

Thai nationalism remains a powerful force in Thailand. Even the resistance to some *farang* artefacts encouraged by Thai nationalism in the reign of King Rama VI showed the persistent essence of Thainess. Mainstream Thai history was written in each period as an official history of the country and then selectively used in school textbooks. After the 1932 revolution ending absolute monarchy, the Fine Arts Department has been the key government agency for editing and publishing Thai mainstream history. Ideologies of Thainess have developed and adjusted from time to time depending on leaders. From monarchy-focused nationalism of King Rama VI to the western-oriented hegemonic policy of twelve *Ratthaniyom* [cultural mandates] of Phibunsongkhram and now the contemporary *Thainiyom* (Thai admiration) of Prayut Chan-o-cha that propagate twelve core values of Thais, these state-produced narratives promote similar core features of Thainess, namely the three pillars of the country: nationhood, religion (Buddhism) and monarchy. The political actions that produced Thai nationalism can also be seen in the form of national policy in each period which form a roadmap for government action. Thainess has also been propagated via state campaigns and mass media blitzes. Siamese/ Thai people, as the message receivers of these projects, were directed into their position as proper subjects. The leaders' notions of Thainess specified the kind of Siamese/Thai people that those leaders intended them to be. This Thainess-promotion process has been diffused in everyday life and gradually formed the gaze towards Thainess of each individual. These efforts are now challenged by globalisation and advanced digital technologies, leading many to ignore, question or challenge the Thainess ideology of the Thai government in today's world.

Benedict Anderson's notion of 'the nation as an imagined community' is a widely cited idea used in many disciplines but is largely missing from analyses of art forms. This thesis addresses this issue when discussing Thainess in the context of modern and largely imported, blended and 'Thai-fied'

theatrical forms. Anderson and his followers have focussed on key points that appear to be of relevance here, notably the 'style' by which communities are imagined and who does the imagining. As this research has shown, the hegemonic 'style' of Thainess is very much concerned with notions of Buddhism and respect for the monarchy, though there is more discussion and dissent in 21st century Thailand than might at first be apparent. Thainess has also been imagined by elites who have grown up with the monarchy, but theirs is not so far removed from more popular versions of Thainess which account for its persistence in Thai society.

The commonplace and widely accepted version of Thainess, although not without its critics, leaves little space for imported 'high art' forms like theatre since there are pre-existing Thai art forms that fill this space and are the focus of national policies and initiatives. Film, for example, is more easily accepted than theatre since it is a more popular medium with its own well developed Thai forms and it is reasonable to argue that its relative accessibility and popularity may have helped with its inclusion in top-down considerations of Thainess. But these top-down conceptions of Thainess have contributed to the somewhat sceptical elite view of imported (*farang*) art forms like theatre and there seems to be little indication of any change in the short to medium term.

Nonetheless, apart from dominant political concept, the notion of Thainess appears to be more flexible and fluid in terms of its economic consumption, namely in the everyday gaze of Thai people. This economic area seems to be a duty-free zone for diverse versions of Thainess that can flexibly negotiate their place in the globalised circumstances of everyday life. In this case, popular media arts, such as mainstream films and television dramas, can freely interplay with the globalised concept of Thainess in daily popular environment as they generally rely on outside commercial investments. Meanwhile, some alternative (non-mainstream) films that aim to reflect serious social issues related to imagined style of Thainess are still forced to confront censorship. This phenomenon is not different from what non-mainstream contemporary performing artists deal with as they often work for aesthetic or social values rather than for commercial values of mainstream artists. In other words, if performing artists need state's funding support, they have to obey and agree with state's ideology centred around the notion of Thainess. On the other hand, if artists want to free themselves from the state's political ideology, they have to be able to invest their own creative effort, time and money and to survive without receiving state funding. When they are able to survive or get international recognition, the Thai state will often spontaneously recognise their value. Otherwise put, the state prefers to buy into those with proven success rather than to risk incubating those who may not become successful. The Thai government seems to position itself as a middleman who is looking for an already successful marketable artwork to promote as Thai creative soft power so they know what they are supporting and also know that such work is in line with the Thai state ideology.

To answer the first research question (RQ. 1) and research sub-question 1.1 (RSQ 1.1), contemporary performing arts are the outcome of western cultural and artistic education in Thailand. After 50 years of embedding themselves in Thailand, these western-oriented performing arts have gradually blended into Thai contexts, while also including elements of Thainess into their work via the worldview, experience or attitude of Thai artists who create or produce their performances. The interactions between the Thai contemporary performing arts and Thainess is mostly content-based rather than form-based. Form-based encounters (traditional and contemporary forms) happened in later period as some western-trained teachers in universities sought to connect modern western style in performing arts with Thai traditional styles and elements. The creation of a hybrid theatre curriculum in universities including Thai traditional dance and western-style training clearly shows this development. Since then, experiments in mixing traditional and contemporary forms have become an important feature of the Thai contemporary theatre scene. These form-based Thai contemporary performances express Thainess via their integration of traditional dance and/or traditional inspired costumes or visible elements, whereas a content-based Thai contemporary performance that keeps western conventions in its presentation is unlikely to be considered Thai and retains an ambiguous status of representing Thainess to the general public. This claim is supported by the examination of audience attitudes towards Thainess in the performing arts as shown in Section 6.8.1. The spectrum of views on Thainess in performing arts appears in the way that the non-audience group, who represents the general public, spontaneously evaluates Thainess in the performing arts they have seen as having a higher or lower degree of Thainess. They tend to evaluate performances based on form, as an unconscious attitude of the general public when considering Thainess, and this is normally based on what they have seen and learned about the historical roots or visible elements of the performance, rather than taking time to carefully consider its contents. This phenomenon creates difficulties as Thai contemporary content-based western forms of performance tend to be evaluated as non-Thai based on a first impression which then affects the gaze of the general public in its evaluation of contemporary performing arts as a western influenced genre, distinct from a Thai performance.

Regarding Thainess in the Thai contemporary performing arts, understanding the origins and interactions of the Thai contemporary performing arts in Thai society implies that a different framework of Thainess evaluation is crucial. If the Thai contemporary performing arts are considered by its default general public mode of Thainess, they are immaterial for the Thai government since they cannot be said to have emerged from the same roots as Thai classical or traditional performances. Therefore, Thai contemporary performing arts are not only excluded in Thai mainstream history, but also invisible in state's policies as representing Thainess.

In response to the second research question (RQ 2) about the gaze towards Thainess, findings from informants' data analysis suggest that three criteria matter here; namely, the conservative gaze, non-conservative gaze and hybrid gaze as discussed in Section 6.4. Surprisingly, overall results from informants show that the conservative gaze, which best conforms to the state ideology of Thainess, appears to be the least espoused whether by audience or the non-audience groups, while most informants held a non-conservative gaze or a hybrid gaze. In addition, when considering the gaze towards Thainess in contemporary performing arts from all stakeholders, the study firstly analysed different layers of the gaze that impact the different understanding of each stakeholder (See more in Figure 30). The state ideology of Thainess has been diffused in the contemporary mediascape and in schools that permeate all stakeholders naturally in their daily life. Audience group members have an extra artistic appreciation gaze or have learned decoding skills to understand the performing arts, while artists/creators/producers have both decoding skills (like the audience group) and encoding skills. These different layers of gaze for each group of stakeholders affect how they see, feel and respond to Thainess in relation to the Thai performing arts. The broad discussion of the audience group and other contemporary performing arts stakeholders agree that evaluating Thainess in contemporary performing arts requires considerations of both form and content, not just the form.

On the other hand, the non-audience group responded differently on Thainess in contemporary performing arts. Because of their limited experience in the contemporary performing arts, they spontaneously consider each kind of performance comparatively and are mainly concerned with appearance of visible stereotypical Thai elements. Their reactions were spontaneously evaluated by their ranking by degrees of Thainess for each genre. For them, *khon* ranks the highest in terms of representing Thainess compared with the local form of *mohlam* while new foreign-influenced contemporary works were ranked as lowest in representing Thainess.

This study also analysed findings on how Thainess is related to the Thai contemporary performing arts by drawing on a spectrum of Thai performing arts. The diamond matrix provided in Chapter 6 illustrates a possible formulation of Thai performances based on two different criteria of form and content with three sub-criteria of traditional, local and contemporary for each criterion (see Figure 31). A work in a traditional form and traditional content appears at the top of the diamond matrix, while the bottom is a work of contemporary form and contemporary content. In terms of actual practice, this study argues that this spectrum of Thainess in Thai performing arts is influenced by the myth of nationalism which creates a mythscape of Thainess for considering Thai performing arts (see Figure 32). Each group of informants responded differently depending on the layer of their own experiences in the Thai contemporary performing arts, as illustrated in Figure 30. Therefore, Thainess can be represented in both performing arts form and content with less emphasis on the

high or low degree of Thainess, meaning that all can be considered Thai. This discussion helps to shed light on research sub-question 2.1 (RSQ 2.1).

Regarding the influence of the audience's gaze towards Thainess on deciding to attend contemporary or traditional performances, as is indicated in research sub-question 2.2 (RSQ 2.2), findings highlight that Thainess does not influence the decision of the audience group while some informants from the non-audience group argued that the state campaign or PR media to promote Thainess could attract them. By contrast, most of the audience group and some non-audience group members deliberated on their decision making to attend performances, stating that Thainess-promoting messages in Thai government campaigns or PR for Thai classical shows failed to attract them to buy tickets for classical performance tickets. They would attend if those works could fulfil their social or aesthetic needs, but not because of admiring the political ideology of Thainess. These typically patriotic messages or PR media of the Thai government to appeal to the general public, on the other hand, may make them less likely to attend.

The findings from the government standpoint about their gaze towards Thainess highlights that the CEA has inclusive and diverse gaze towards Thainess. In the economic market sphere, Thainess is negotiable in all traditional / contemporary content and forms if those performing arts are marketable to generate economic value for the country, while the Office of Performing Arts under the Fine Arts Department who is maintaining and preserving Thai classical form of performance unveiled that globalised influences and *farang* techniques are also implicitly employed in their traditional performances. This implies that there is tacit negotiation between *farang*-ness and Thainess in traditional productions, while those production can still present Thai traditional appearance. In the case of the OCAC, who has direct responsibility to contemporary arts, an official personally has good understanding of contemporary performing arts but is unable to act on it due to the means and the goals of the agency he works for. OCAC operations are framed by state's ideology of Thainess under the Ministry of Culture which automatically generates barriers to contemporary artists and those officials who may understand their challenges.

Evidence from document research findings in Section 4.2.9 and 4.2.10 suggests that Thai cultural policy has been generated based on economic values and goals rather than cultural ones. National policy is based on economic development and growth and currently emphasises creative industries whose focus is largely on tourism. Policy for the contemporary arts started in 2002 when the Ministry of Culture was re-established and the OCAC was set up. In the two decades of OCAC operations, Thailand's unstable politics has deeply affected the direction of cultural policy, which has remained focused on the traditional arts and culture as the best representation of the state ideology of Thainess. The analysis of twelve NESDPs in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.9, supports this argument as all NESDPs have been explicitly concentrating on the preservation, maintenance and restoration of

national arts and culture. Additionally, foreign influences have also been seen as threats to Thai national arts and culture and in need of state monitoring.

In addition, under the last military government, a new long-term 20-year National Strategy (2018-2037) was proclaimed as a top level policy and has become a mechanism to control and regulate the country's overall national administrative direction. On the one hand, this seems to be a positive action as national development is considered in a long-term view. On the other hand, in terms of arts and culture, this national strategy emphasises more on state ideology of Thainess, referring to the three pillars of the country. The main state agency charged with carrying out this policy issue is the Ministry of Culture. This research argues that this hegemonic goal in a top level policy trumps all second and third level policies. The action plans of all agencies under the Ministry of Culture are also affected, including the OCAC. Though the OCAC's officials have progressive ideas on how to foster the contemporary arts, this phenomenon indicates that in practice the OCAC has to administer under the sway of the top-level policy. In other words, the scope of contemporaneity that the OCAC can support is framed by how it can secure the three pillars of the country as the crucial components of Thainess. That means if the OCAC cannot support artists who may touch the three pillars in a critical way despite their potentials to create excellent works.

Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing artists argue about this issue and how the different ideologies of Thainess in performing arts from the Thai state affect contemporary performing artists. The findings highlighted two distinctive features that make contemporary works different from Thai traditional works. Firstly, the content of contemporary works tends to advocate social equality and the ability and desire to be able to convey everyone's story, and not just the glorious stories of heroes, kings and leaders. Secondly, contemporary artists feel they must need to offer progressive works to prepare audiences for the future. This phenomenon illustrates the large gap between the OCAC and non-mainstream contemporary performing artists based on the different beliefs on the ideology of Thainess in today's world. The findings show that the contemporary performing arts find it extremely challenging to navigate the Thai mythscape of nationalism centred on Thainess as discussed in Section 6.8 and Figure 32. The diffusion among the general public of a state-promoted mythscape of Thainess generates emotionally based actions through state campaigns, PR media, and education system. It then forms the gaze towards Thainess among Thai people which leads to evaluating things according to the Thai / non-Thai binary. This responds to research sub-question 2.3.

The third research question (RQ 3) and research sub-question 3.1 (RSQ 3.1) about funding support model for the arts in Thailand was examined by the synthesis in Chapter 5, Section 5.2, noting that many resources of funding were illustrated, such as 1) domestic arts and cultural support offices, 2) domestic offices or organisations (unrelated to arts fields), 3) private sponsors and 4) international

organisations. For Thai government funding, although the OCAC has direct responsibility on contemporary arts, many stakeholders criticise its inefficient budget allocations and lack of transparency in funding decisions, while there are limited resources of funding for truly arts-focus purposes. Thai state funding for the contemporary arts is not only small portion of the overall budget but it mostly goes to short-term support with demanding requirements, so the government's unsupportive mechanism also generates huge barriers to contemporary artists. Moreover, paradoxical relationship between tradition and contemporaneity and the different polars of Thainess ideology between Thai state and contemporary artists likewise generate difficulties for Thai contemporary performing artists seeking funding support from Thai government.

In response to the research sub-question 3.2 (RSQ 3.2), the majority of stakeholders agreed that foreign funding organisations play a crucial role in supporting the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector. Foreign organisations generally have a clearer vision and mission than the Thai state and have straightforward action if they have an agenda to support artists. International grants are more flexible in terms of practices as they give artists more freedom of expression. Foreign funding agencies' staffs are proactive and friendly with an arm's-length relationship with local Thai artists. They often attend contemporary performing arts events and try to connect with Thai artists. On the other hand, non-mainstream performing artists underscore that Thai state officials cannot do the same, not only in terms of connecting with Thai artists but also in terms of providing support by participation in the events and offering grant. Many Thai cutting-edge productions have been given foreign funds to perform a piece at festivals overseas that they may not stage in Thailand. To show these pieces in Thailand, most support comes from ad hoc funding from the private sector rather than the Thai government. Additionally, Thai audiences have also gained benefits from watching those challenging works and have had an opportunity to watch many exceptional international productions that these international grants have also brought to perform in Thailand.

Performing artists in Thailand worry about the sustainability of foreign support as those grants are part of cultivating those countries' foreign policies and those policies often change. Foreign agencies have no responsibility to support Thai artists and Thai artists who rely on those grants will be impacted by policy changes by those countries. Gaining foreign funding for a collaborative project with foreign artists comes with conditions. Thai artists must comply with those conditions of the sponsors. One informant argued that an ideal solution to deal with a collaborative project would be for the Thai government to take a proactive role by accommodating matching funds with foreign agencies and partially subsidising it. This could be difficult since the Thai government allows for a limited range in freedom of expression, particularly on political issues and elements of Thainess.

Foreign funding and support has been directly and indirectly benefited the Thai contemporary performing arts scene, enriching both artistic creativity and audience development.

The above summary outlines the constraints affecting the development of Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing arts and its audiences and responds to the main objectives of this research. The research done to address the research questions of this study reaffirms that the complex difficulties in official Thai arts and culture which non-mainstream contemporary performing artists have long faced resulted in an invisibility of audiences in policy, research and practice in Thailand.

In conclusion, this thesis has examined some of the major unexplored reasons for the strong conflict between state efforts to protect and preserve the arts and culture via a stagnant gaze towards an imaginary Thainess and a fluid globalised gaze held by many contemporary Thais, particularly by contemporary artists. This conflict has adversely affected the development of the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector in Thailand. These findings and discussions also point to further crucial questions: How to find a meeting ground and common issues between these two contrasting ideologies so that the state and its artists can help each other and together help Thailand thrive? For the artists, how can the Thai non-mainstream performing arts sector move from questions of self-sustaining to questions of mutual support and collective thriving?

7.2 Research originality and key contributions

As briefly stated in Chapter 1, Section 1.7, this thesis makes several original contributions. Firstly, the academic study of Thai contemporary performing arts administration is new in relation to the area of Thai theatre studies, especially the empirical work on audience development and performing arts administration in Thailand. This research deals with new subject areas rather than the historical issues. As discussed in the analysis of current arts audience research in Thailand in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, this research is a first milestone in Thailand's contemporary performing arts administration and audience development studies. As a primary study, it made contributions that future research can build upon. In other words, it will be a crucial fundamental resource that other researchers who want to study in the area of performing arts administration in Thailand need to consult before exploring further issues. (The recommendation of future study is discussed later in Section 7.4 below).

Secondly, this research combined the author's unique experiences as a theatre practitioner, theatre producer, theatregoer, academic lecturer/researcher and performing arts administrator into a distinctive framework for considering the current situation of contemporary performing arts in

Thailand. Mixing the approaches of an academic researcher and a performing arts administrator can help to provide a broad yet balanced perspective on the tensions between contemporary performing artists and Thai government officials. The resulting multidimensional and integrated approach allowed for an examination of the historically formed barriers facing Thailand's contemporary performing arts sector that linked performing arts history, in both traditional and contemporary forms, to political history and cultural policy development. Using the Thainess/*farang* binary together with theories of the gaze, the thesis navigated through the evolving relations between a Thai nationalist ideological framework and the changing landscape of the contemporary performing arts. This integrated perspective, which differs from that of political scientists and historians in Thai studies, can help generate new uses of the gaze of Thainess in relation to the Thai performing arts as shown in the spectrum of Thainess in performing arts in Section 6.8. The work can also help to advance the field of Thai performing arts administration and performing arts studies and Thai studies.

This research fills a gap in the field of contemporary performing arts studies in Thailand by offering results that help explain the institutional neglect and official invisibility of Thai non-mainstream performing arts. The study identified some hidden barriers in arts and culture in Thailand that limit the development of Thai non-mainstream contemporary performing arts and its audiences through a critical framework that aimed to clarify those constraints. The results helped produce a better understanding of the divide between non-mainstream Thai artists and Thai state in terms of private (in their organisations) and public administration.

Additionally, this research offers an advanced perspective that benefits not only researchers in the field of performing arts but also in various other fields. For example, in cultural and public policy studies, the discussion on the different gazes of artistic appreciation between audience and non-audience groups in Chapter 6, Section 6.7.1, can help advance the comprehension of policy makers or politicians in making cultural policy. In addition, the study highlights the idea of the mythscape of Thainess that can generate negative impacts and need to relate to public administration and governance. These findings help create awareness on unintentional bias that might occur during the policy making process. This awareness can lead to more inclusive and well-rounded consideration in terms of policy planning. The findings in this research can advance understanding for government, policy makers and politicians.

Furthermore, the informants' attitude towards Thainess extracted from the findings and discussed in Section 6.4 can benefit social science and political science researchers. It not only aligns and reaffirms with discussions of scholars in Thai studies on the Thai state hegemonic policy to propagate Thainess and the influence of foreign and globalisation, but the outcome of this research also challenges previous works as the result illustrated that informants who have conservative gaze (or agree with the hegemonic view and unquestionably receive the state message) is the smallest

proportion in both audience and non-audience groups. This example will also be widely discussed in research implication and limitations section. Therefore, the research findings will be useful resources for researchers from different disciplines to help their research in many other fields of research.

Finally, this study not only makes numerous Thai sources accessible in English but analyses them in relation to one another and puts them in a historical context. For Thai studies in particular, this research makes a significant contribution to the discussion of Thainess (as a notion of nationalism) and its relationships with *farang*-ness from the perspective of non-mainstream contemporary performing arts stakeholders which is hardly seen in Thai studies. Its findings help reaffirm previous research and challenge some of those thoughts by adding a contemporary perspective. The unique findings and discussion of this study also expands the works of scholars in Thai studies that the researcher used in the critical framework for the study.

7.3 Limitations of research

There were some limitations of this research project. First, like much qualitative research conducted for a PhD, this project was conducted by the researcher himself, using focus groups; therefore, the scale was quite small. Although the informant sampling process was designed to be representative of the public as much as possible, covering areas of Thailand in the Bangkok metropolitan area and other regions, the total number of informants in focus groups was somewhat limited.

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3, the sampling process of focus group informants was done during the unstable period of the Covid-19 pandemic, so all interviews had to be conducted online as ZOOM meetings. This limited some aspects of the focus group interviews online, since ZOOM meetings were not comfortable for all age groups, particularly for elderly informants who lacked abilities to use computers or those who lacked reliable internet access. After carefully considering and consulting with support survey data in 2020-2022 by the Thai Theatre Foundation about the average age range of contemporary Theatre goers who actively responded (between 18 and 50 years old), the researcher categorised focus group informants into three age groups, namely group A of those aged 18-29 years old, group B of those aged 30-39 years and group C of those 40 years and above. The number of those in each age range was quite limited.

Despite these limitations, the dissertation illustrates the need for future uses or applications, and also suggests areas for future research, which will be considered in the next section.

7.4 From research implications in policy and practices to the recommendation of future study

The findings and analysis of Thai cultural policy in this dissertation offers a new multidimensional and integrated perspective on public policy in Thailand's arts and culture. The policy implications underscore some areas of bias that might inadvertently affect policy making that could be corrected by being more inclusive in policy planning processes. Moreover, the emphasis on economic goals and the overemphasis on a state-centred top-down ideology of Thainess creates imbalances in national policy planning that could produce more disadvantages than advantages for the arts, something seen in the difficulties faced by the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector. This study argues that understanding of myth of Thainess and its impact on policy processes can help to refocus more on analysis rather than emotion in Thailand's policy planning and administration. Policymakers and politicians can benefit the country by considering how these understandings could be included in their practices and thereby improve the public administration of arts and culture.

Secondly, the above imbalances in policy planning tied to arts and culture suggest some missing agenda items in the actions of the Ministry of Culture and the OCAC. With a national policy goal of economic growth, the practices of the Ministry of Culture and the OCAC – who are responsible for fostering the contemporary arts – could better focus on nurturing artists so they can better add some monetary value to the creative economy. Without this artistic nurturing in the work of the OCAC and the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry's action plans that focus on national economic expansion policies fail to recognise that non-mainstream artists need to develop their excellence before they can provide creative energies to support national economic growth. It is important to see non-mainstream contemporary performing artists as basic creative human resources who need time, space and support to develop before they can add economic value to the creative economy. In other words, non-mainstream contemporary performing artists may not immediately directly generate economic value, but they do indirectly enhance the country's economy by supplying well-trained performers, practitioners or creative workers to profit-oriented film or TV industries. State policy and practice does not recognise the need for this kind of investment in the arts because it focuses too much on market-ready end products that can suddenly make a large economic impact. Similarly, state funding also focuses too much on supporting projects deemed to have big economic benefits without considering the long-term investments needed to foster the artistic resources that could generate those projects. The investment in primary artistic resources discussed above is a major issue for the Thai government to consider since artists not only need long-term grants, but the possibility for consistent support.

Thirdly, the findings on the gaze of Thainess in the contemporary performing arts point to attitudinal changes and implicit resistances to the idea of Thainess in a highly mediated and globalised general Thai public. This is seen not only in audience/non-audience and contemporary performing arts stakeholders, but also in the state-led traditional performing arts sector (see more in Section 6.7). The social implications from this research suggest a need for a better awareness of complex attitudes towards Thainess and the gaze on Thainess in the contemporary performing arts. Though this research is based on stakeholders in the non-mainstream contemporary performing arts sector, as a case study it suggests significant changes in views towards Thainess, due to globalising influences. They can be adapted to study both societal norms or behaviour studies and cultural practices. This thesis can be developed into a larger scale to cover groups of older informants and more parts of the country and extended to include local or folk performing arts (or other art forms). Although this study focuses on the contemporary performing arts sector and its interplay with the state ideology of Thainess emphasised in the discourse of elite or well-educated Thais, it also suggests that studying the local or folk performing arts sector and their local audiences would be enhanced by critical studies in relation to the outsized influence of the state. In other words, the majority of available research in local performing arts were conducted under the hegemonic norm of the state as researchers generally accept this norm and are afraid to question, argue or think differently.

Fourthly, informants from performing arts organisations studied here indicated some data gaps that need to be clarified to limit confusion and prepare performing arts organisations or the government to use the data for further development in both performing arts administration and organisation. As the Thai contemporary performing arts is a sector with little ongoing investment, primary data for this sector has not been systematically collected and archived. This lack ensures that the sector remains invisible in the public record. Basic surveys on the demographics and functions of non-mainstream contemporary arts sector in Thai society is crucial here since these data will provide a public understanding to help support further study in the field. Furthermore, the non-official status of non-mainstream performing arts organisations also means that they lack any official understanding of operations or managements. Since most are artists-run organisations, it would be valuable to have some training on systematic managerial know-how such as arts entrepreneurial approach, organisation management or arts marketing seems to be crucial for them. The development of healthy arts organisations will hopefully lead to the building up of promising arts audience. This suggests the need of further research on workable business approaches or models for Thai non-mainstream performing artist organisations.

Finally, there are some tax or legal aspects that some stakeholders suggested are lacking in Thailand. There are limited incentives for private companies to donate to support arts and cultural

activities. The government recognises donation on only five types of funds under the Ministry of Culture for which donors may receive company tax reductions. Moreover, regulations for non-profit organisations or company registration also need to be clarified and highlighted as regular rules, since they are not suitable for new non-profit theatre troupes. These legal and tax issues need to be reconsidered by the government to support its creative economy policy and to dismantle some barriers to creativity. Nonetheless, further studies on the legal impact such as case studies for enhancing local and private support for the arts and possible incentives for donors are needed to support the government consideration.

The study of performing arts administration studies in Thailand is still young, with research dating back barely a decade, so there are many more topics to be explored in this area. The researcher hopes that this dissertation has laid the foundation for this new area of study in Thailand.

Appendix 1

List of non-mainstream contemporary performing arts festivals in Thailand

Bangkok Theatre Festival (BTF) and Bangkok Theatre Network (BTN)

BTF is a longest-running contemporary theatre festival in Thailand, starting in 2002 by veteran theatre artists who formed the BTN to organise the BTF. Normally held in November as a fringe festival, it offers an opportunity for many theatre practitioners to present their work and to share their practices and experiences.

Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting (BIPAM)

BIPAM was set up in 2017 after a group of young and promising Thai theatre producers and artists had previously received grants from the Japan Foundation to join TPAM-The Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama, Japan. The idea of launching an international platform for performing arts in Bangkok was inspired among theatre producers and artists hoping to make Bangkok into a regional hub of arts and culture in Southeast Asia (SEA). Since then, it has held the meeting each year.

Bangkok International Children's Theatre Festival (BICT Fest)

This biannual event began in 2016 by a small group of theatre practitioners and arts managers who aimed to deliver high quality performing arts experiences to children and families in Thailand.

The Unfolding Kafka Festival

The Unfolding Kafka Festival is a biennial international contemporary dance festival held since 2015 with the co-operative efforts of various international partners, e.g., Goethe-Institut Thailand, Japan Foundation, the Embassy of France and the Embassy of Israel (Chompee, 2022).

Appendix 2

A: Indicative questions for in-depth interviews

Interview Targets: 15 representatives (from the governmental sector, private performing arts sector / artists, funding agencies, theatre critics and corporate sponsors)

Interview Location: online platform (Zoom)

Interview Duration: 45–60 mins (3 mins. for each question)

1. What do you think about the current Thai contemporary arts situation, with a special focus on your view based on your own field of work (in theatre, dance, visual arts etc.)?

(Lead the interviewee to examine the question from many different perspectives, such as political influence, policy support, arts infrastructure, the ecosystem of arts and culture, role of artists, and also of audiences)

2. How would you describe the 'Thai contemporary arts'? What are its main characteristics or features in your opinion?
3. How would you define 'Thainess'? What is the place of 'Thainess' in the arts and culture sector? What could currently define a contemporary work as 'Thai' and what is not 'Thai'? How easy is it to distinguish one from the other?
4. Is the funding system for the contemporary arts efficient and fair in this country?

If yes, Why? / provide examples.

If not, What is missing? How could it be more efficient and fair?

What are the main problems for this funding?

5. Question for interviewees from governmental sector:

- *When talking about audiences for the contemporary performing arts from a governmental point of view, who are they? Where are they in the policy making?*

Question for interviewees from private arts organisation sector / artists:

- *When talking about audiences for the contemporary arts from your organisation's viewpoint, who are they? Where are they in your production making?*

Question for Interviewees from funding agencies / corporate sponsors:

- *When talking about audiences for the contemporary performing arts in your organisation's viewpoint, who are they? Where are they in the system of arts that you support?*

6. Artists often complain that 'most Thai people don't want to pay for the arts (i.e., buy tickets for theatre/dance pieces, arts exhibitions, etc.)', Do you agree or disagree with this complaint?

(If you agree) Why do you agree, can you give an example or two of this?

(If you disagree) Can you give more information on that? How much do you think people are or should be prepared to pay for in the contemporary arts?

(Additional question) How much do you think people are or should be prepared to pay for in the contemporary arts?

7. Some research suggests that artists, especially contemporary theatre makers and dancers, seem to be invisible professions to the government in terms of their (economic) value when compared to commercial mass media (i.e., TV, film, digital driven medias and etc.). How do you feel about this claim?

8. Aside from economic value, do you think that the contemporary arts contribute other 'values' to Thai culture or society?

If so, which values? – give an example or two;

If not, what role do the contemporary arts have in Thailand today?

9. What are the three (3) biggest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the contemporary arts in Thailand?

Ask different questions to interviewees from governmental sector, artist / private arts organisation sector, funding agency / corporate sponsor sector, academic / cultural expert sector

10. In your opinion, what should be the three (3) top concerns or priorities for cultural policy making in Thailand now?

11. What's in store for the future of the contemporary arts in Thailand?

Questions for interviewees from governmental sector:

- *From a governmental perspective, what's the future of Thai contemporary arts and culture in a post-COVID Thailand? [give examples or priorities]*
- *Do you agree with the claim that it's 'hopeless', which is what most of artists may be tempted to say? What are some signs of hope?*
- *What should we do to reach the future goals? / How do we reach those goals?*

Questions for interviewees from private arts organisation sector / artists:

- *From an artist or arts organisation perspective, what's the future of Thai contemporary arts and culture in a post-COVID Thailand?*
- *Do you agree with the claim that it's 'hopeless', as most of artists would say? What are some signs of hope or new opportunities?*
- *What should we do to reach the future goals? / How do we reach those goals?*

Questions for interviewees from funding agencies / corporate sponsors:

- *From a funding agency / corporate sponsor perspective, what's the future of Thai contemporary arts and culture in a post-COVID Thailand?*
- *Do you agree with the claim that it's 'hopeless', as most artists would say? What are some signs of hope or new opportunities?*
- *What should we do to reach the future goals? / How do we reach those goals?*

Questions for interviewees from media sector:

- *From a critic's perspective, what's the future of Thai contemporary arts and culture in a post-COVID Thailand?*
- *Do you agree with the claim that it's 'hopeless', as most artists would say? What are some signs of hope or new opportunities?*
- *What should be done to reach future goals? / How do we reach those goals?*

12. Do you have any further comments / recommendations on these topics?

B: Indicative questions / discussion topics for focus groups

Focus group Targets: 12 groups of 5 participants for each group (Total: 60 participants)

Focus group Location: Live online session via Zoom meeting

Focus group Duration: 45–60 minutes

To warm up participants⁵⁴, the researcher will show 3 short video clips (5-8 minutes in total), including a Thai contemporary performance clip, a Thai local performance clip and a Thai traditional performance clip, before following up with the questions for group discussion as follows.

1. Discussion topics about their performance watching experiences (both contemporary and traditional)
 - Performance watching experiences and reasons to attend or not to attend
 - Experiences of enjoying entertainment programmes on electronic devices
 - Live watching in the venue vs. watching a recording on electronic devices
 - Experiences or any services that they prefer to receive from theatre companies or venues
 - The impact of Covid-19 on their decision-making post pandemic.
 - Social media and electronic devices usage in daily life

2. What do you think about these 3 performances that we watched?

(Lead the participants to examine and discuss the different perspectives of contemporary performing arts and traditional performing arts and their viewpoints.)

Optional questions to help lead the direction of the discussion

- How would you describe the ‘Thai contemporary arts’?
- What are its main characteristics or features, in your opinion?

3. How would you define ‘Thainess’?

Optional questions to help lead the direction of the discussion

- What could currently define a contemporary work as ‘Thai’ and what is not ‘Thai’?
- How easy is it to distinguish one from the other?

4. Aside from economic values, do you think that the contemporary arts contribute other ‘values’ to Thai culture or society?

If so, which values? – give an example or two;

If not, what role do the contemporary arts have in Thailand today

⁵⁴ This warm-up activity is compulsory for the non-audience group.

Glossary of traditional Thai performances

<i>hun krabok</i>	rod puppet theatre
<i>khon</i>	masked dance drama based on the <i>Ramayana</i>
<i>lakhon chatri</i>	recognised as the oldest folk style of Thai dance-drama
<i>lakhon chatri khong luang</i>	like <i>lakhon chatri</i> but performed by royal court female dancers
<i>lakhon dukdamban</i>	singing dance drama
<i>lakhon na jo</i>	dance drama performed in front of shadow play screen
<i>lakhon nai</i>	inner court <i>dance-drama</i>
<i>lakhon nok</i>	<i>outer court dance-drama</i>
<i>lakhon nok baeb luang</i>	royal style of outer court theatre
<i>lakhon phanthang</i>	Thai hybrid theatre mixing diverse cultures from various communities in Bangkok, e.g., Mon, Chinese, Malay etc.
<i>lakhon phut</i>	spoken theatre play in a modern style
<i>lakhon phut salab lam</i>	spoken drama interspersed with songs
<i>lakhon ram</i>	classical dance-drama
<i>lakhon rong</i>	singing drama
<i>lakhon sepha</i>	story-telling dance drama
<i>lakhon talok</i>	spoken comedy
<i>lam tat</i>	indigenous repartee performance / verse singing battle performance
<i>likay</i>	a popular form of melodramatic musical dance drama
<i>mohlam</i>	Isan or northeastern popular theatre
<i>nang yai</i>	large shadow puppet performances
nang talung	small shadow puppet of the south
<i>nora</i>	southern ritual song and dance theatre

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