Preservation of Traditional Art: The Case of the *Nooraa* Performance in Southern Thailand

Takako Iwasawa
Osaka, Japan

Abstract

This paper looks at the history of *nooraa*, a traditional performance art as well as a cultural symbol of contemporary Southern Thailand. It shows how *nooraa* is being preserved and how performers have transformed it and adapted it to modern Thai culture in order to maintain the art form. The *nooraa* dance is no longer restricted to those who come from a rich tradition of *nooraa*; instead, it is being performed and studied by the general public. Members of the general public, who used to be the audience, have become part of a new class of performers due to the introduction of cultural education within the education system. This is the result of a campaign led by the government to revitalise traditional culture at the national and local levels. This study elucidates how the general public and professional *nooraa* performers are both becoming involved in the movement for the preservation of traditional culture, and how, while they share the same goals, they are recreating tradition in many different ways.

Keywords: *noora, revitalising tradition, Thai identity, khana, khrum*.

Introduction

Nooraa is a genre of traditional performance art that is found in Southern Thailand and Northern Malaysia[1]. It combines dance, music, singing, narrative verse, theatrical play, sorcery and ritual. It is believed to be among the oldest theatrical traditions in Thailand, and it is also considered to be the ancestor of the Thai dance drama lakhon, which is a genre that was developed and perfected under the patronage of royalty and the aristocracy in central Thailand. Although the exact date and place of origin are not known, it is believed that *nooraa* dates back five to seven hundred years (Guelden 2005: 181). According to southern Thai mythology, the performance most likely evolved in the region around Songkhla Lake, the largest inland body of water in the country.

Since ancient times, *nooraa* performers have not resided in a fixed place, as their performances require them to travel around the countryside. When troupes received an offer from clients, they would set out on a journey, but they would return home after the show to engage in farming, fishing and other work to supplement their income. The lifestyle of the *nooraa* performers can thus be categorised as a semi-nomadic[2] one. Their lives are divided between seasons on the road and seasons spent working in the fields.

Nooraa performers are constantly adapting to the changes in Thai society so as to keep audiences satisfied and entertained. They are also troubled by the difficulty of finding new performers, as the younger generation today prefers to work in modernised companies located in urban areas where income is more stable.

In this paper, I explore the question of how *nooraa* performance art has changed and how it is being revived and revitalised. I focus on two groups of people engaged in the revitalisation of *nooraa*: *nooraa* professional performers and amateur *nooraa* activists who are concerned with reviving the arts using various methods, including efforts in schools and universities.[3]

Nooraa in the Traditional Context

Before examining the current status of *nooraa*, we need to describe what the original practitioners of *nooraa* were like. After we gain a deeper appreciation of the history behind *nooraa*, it will then be appropriate to discuss the new challenges faced by *nooraa* performers and the transformation that is occurring in *nooraa* performances and among the performers themselves.

In the traditional context, we can categorise those who are involved in *nooraa* performance into two groups: members of *nooraa* troupes and main audiences. I will attempt to look at the roles that both troupes and audiences play.

The Nooraa troupe

A *nooraa* troupe is made up of several components. A troupe generally consists of dancers, musicians, sorcerers, and attendants. The number of individuals in a troupe can range from fourteen to twenty people (Udom Nuuthaung 2536/1993: 31–32). The group of dancers is made up of seven to ten people. This includes a nooraa master, known as the *nooraa yai*, who plays the role of the troupe leader. The other dancers are called *naang ram*. The dancers have a wide range of performing abilities: they not only dance but also sing songs, perform narratives, and act. However, their main role in the performance is to dance, a fact made evident by the name given to them, *naang ram*, which means dancer.

A *nooraa* troupe requires five to seven musicians, called *luuk khuu*. The traditional musical ensemble includes the *pi*, a double-reed, oboe-like shawm; the *thap*, a pair of goblet-shaped drums; the *ching*, a pair of small hand cymbals; the *mong*, a pair of small brass gongs in a wooden box; the *krap*, a wooden clapper; and the *klong*, a two-faced drum. The musicians

who play these musical instruments also form the chorus. When the master sings an invocation verse, the musicians follow the master and sing while playing their own instruments in antiphonal (call and response) style. The dancers are often called upon to help the musicians play the instruments.

Every troupe has one dance master who leads the troupe. The dance master, *nooraa yai*, has the ability to perform special magic and also offers highly-developed knowledge and skill. He acts as a sorcerer and is referred to as the *mau kop roong*[4]. Dance masters use their magical knowledge to guarantee healing and a successful performance as they manipulate the spiritual powers of the *nooraa* teachers through possession and incantation. The last position in a *nooraa* troupe is the attendant, known as *taa sua*. The attendant is not a performer but instead is responsible for making arrangements for the travelling show and assisting the performers.

From ancient times up until the early twentieth century, the passing down of traditional *nooraa* has been undertaken solely by male performers. In the twentieth century, female *nooraa* performers started to enter this highly exclusive performing world, and today they have become very active, surpassing male performers in number. In general, male *nooraa* performers still secure the most important roles in this tradition, especially the role of the ritual master. The ritual masters have not given up their position to make way for female *nooraa* masters. Guelden (2005) sees this as one of the challenges women face in this exclusive performing society.

Audiences

Traditionally, both the performers and the audience have played important roles in *nooraa*. *Nooraa* performers generally have two different types of audiences. The first type of audience consists of the kin of *nooraa* performers, including the family members of the living *nooraa* performers and the descendants of the dead *nooraa* performers. The second group of audience-members consists of the general public, those not related to *nooraa* performers. The family members of the *nooraa* performers are of great importance, as they are seen as the ones who impart knowledge and wisdom to the *nooraa* performers. They are the main participants of the ritual called *nooraa roong khruu* (*roong*: building; *khruu*: spirit-teacher). This ritual is recognised as the most valued activity of *nooraa* performers and other ritual participants. The descendants of *nooraa* performers are expected to perform the ritual regularly in order to pay homage to the spirit-teacher of *nooraa*. To conduct the ritual, an offering of food and a performance are required to be presented to the spirit-teacher. Therefore, the person hosting the ritual will invite the professional *nooraa* troupe to practice the ritual. The leader of the troupe takes charge as the ritual master and leads all of the participants. *Nooraa roong khruu* is also acknowledged as the symbolic space to which spirit-teachers descend. Through the practice of the ritual, both *nooraa* performers and audiences can have strong connections with each other because they belong to the same group, named *chua saai nooraa*, which is headed by the spirit-teacher.

In the southern part of Thailand, a unique communal group known as *chua saai nooraa* has been organised by the people who live there. *Chua* means source and *saai* means line. *Chua saai nooraa* is characterised by the two lines of human relationships: that of the teacher-disciple and that of the ancestor-descendant. Traditionally, *nooraa* performances have been passed down from grandfather, father or uncle to grandson, son, or nephew through a system of patrilineal inheritance. Men born in *nooraa* families have been expected to become performers

in order to maintain and continue the family tradition. If they did not become performers, the descendants of *nooraa* were required to be good audiences or patrons.

The members of *chua saai nooraa* have strong beliefs in the occult power of *nooraa*. To benefit from the power of the spirit-teacher, they practice the ritual of paying homage to the spirit-teacher. By carrying out this ritual regularly, the descendants come to understand how *nooraa* performances work. They understand how to communicate with the spirit-teacher and the original myth of *nooraa* through the intermediary of the professional *nooraa* performers. In accordance with tradition, most performers come from a *nooraa* lineage, but it is possible for others to enter into the *nooraa* world. Once someone who does not belong to the *nooraa* lineage becomes a *nooraa* performer, his or her family members automatically become part of the *nooraa* community, *chua saai nooraa*.

Throughout time, members of *chua saai nooraa* have supported this genre of performance as performers, audience-members and patrons. In the traditional context, *nooraa* is known as a ritual performance meant to foster communication with the spirit-teacher rather than as a form of entertainment. However, in contemporary Thailand, as a result of the influence of modernisation and development of mass media, the traditional practitioners who can manipulate this occult power are gradually decreasing. In order to survive, the traditional performers have been forced to change their performances, which were formerly based on communication with the spirit-teacher, into performances that focus more on entertainment. Due to this change, *noorra* has come to accept a new type of practitioner: the amateur performer who does not necessarily have any background in this spiritual power.

The next section describes two current trends among the professionals and amateurs who are trying to revitalise this art tradition. How has the *nooraa* performance evolved in contemporary society? Can the form be sustained through change?

Revitalisation of Tradition among the Professionals

In contemporary Thailand, professional performers of *nooraa* have had to contend with two ambiguous tendencies: commercial entertainment and authentic art traditions. They can be divided into *beap saakhon* (*beap:* style, *saakhon*: western, universal) and *beap booraan* (*booraan*: traditional). The former is westernised performance that eliminates some traditional parts such as the ritual performance and employs modern instruments and styles in order to target younger audiences. The latter follows a more traditional performance style, though it is not necessarily the same style as that of traditional performances where particular attention is given to ritual.

Modernisation of performance: The emergence of beap saakhon

During the late 1960s, *nooraa* was divided into two overlapping categories—performance for commercial entertainment and performance for ritual purposes. By combining western musical technology with Thai songs, *nooraa* was repackaged to appeal to modern southern Thai tastes at large outdoor country fairs where ancestral rites were increasingly being excluded (Guelden 2005: 185).

According to Ginsburg (1972), many of the old *nooraa* troupes have survived. In order to compete with new forms of entertainment that are vastly appealing to the modern rural audience, they have resorted to emulating modernised entertainment styles. Ginsburg (1972: 172) argues that the most successful troupes today[5] copy the *luk thung* formula 'where performers in western dresses sing long narrative ballads with romantic themes, accompanied by a western style band, with interspersed comic skits and jokes while retaining perhaps a smattering of the traditional dance and comic verse'.

The new style of *nooraa* that has emerged more recently is called *nooraa beap saakhon*. It is differentiated from the traditional style, *nooraa beap booraan* (Suphat Naakseen 2539/1996: 30). This new style, however, is not completely westernised or modernised. *Beap saakhon* is a mix of traditional and modern /western styles. In 1999, I observed a modern *nooraa* troupe in a festival held in the NakhonSiThammarat province. The performance was an entertainment show without any aspect of ritual performance. The festival that I visited is called *Ngaan duan sip*[6] (the tenth month festival). It is the biggest local festival in NakhonSiThammarat province and normally lasts for ten days annually from evening until midnight. During this period, a large number of people come into the city centre and gather at the biggest public park in the city, where they can enjoy various kinds of entertainment. People enjoy the spectacle, which includes carnival rides, various booths selling goods, and performance stages. Many troupes, including those that perform *nooraa* and shadow puppet theatre, *nang talung* (which are cultural symbols in the southern part of Thailand), visit and perform daily. In general, the *nooraa* and *nang talung* troupes set up their own stages in vacant lots where they perform all night long. *Nooraa* that is performed at such festivals can be largely divided into two groups. One is the traditional *beap booraan* group and the other is the modern *beap saakhon* group.

The modern *nooraa* troupe that I observed during this festival built a bigger and more modernised stage than the traditional one, and had a bigger band that included western musical instruments like electric guitars, a synthesiser, and drum sets. In this spectacular show, a large number of young girls emerged and started dancing, as in the chorus line of the 'vaudeville' shows that Guelden had mentioned (Guelden 2005: 184–185).

From this case study, we find that the modernisation of *nooraa* brings with it a remarkable change in various aspects of the traditional performance, including differences in musical instruments, the music itself, and the stage equipment. It should be highlighted that dancing without singing the text is also a characteristic of the modernisation of *nooraa*. Making the

performance clearly understandable was an effective way of getting a wider audience (made up of those who have a smaller knowledge base regarding traditional *nooraa* performance) interested in *nooraa*. In the traditional context, *nooraa* performers are famous for performing *tham bot*[7], which means dancing while singing the text. A traditional performer learns a large number of song texts in addition to dance techniques, and they have to interpret the song texts in order to choreograph the dances. Audiences also are expected to appreciate the various interpretations of the performers in this context. Currently, however, many audiences do not understand tham bot as they did in the past. To survive, the modern *nooraa* performers blend tradition with modern elements, establishing a mixed and eclectic style of performance.

At the same time, a traditional revival of *nooraa* is taking place. Along with the influence of nationalism, people are inclined to attribute authority and authenticity to the older culture.

Revival of tradition: The practice of Anurak Thai

In 1999, I had the opportunity to observe a *nooraa* ritual held by a *nooraa* family in a village in the Songkhla province. What I was able to observe was the *noraa roong khruu ritual* organised by a family belonging to the *chua saai nooraa*. The family invited one of the most famous *nooraa* masters to conduct the ritual. He took his troupe to the ritual site and allowed the members of the group to help with the ritual performance. They communicated with the spirit-teacher of *nooraa* in the traditional sense. Interestingly, the members of the troupe invited to the ritual insisted that they are the practitioners of Anurak Thai (*anurak*: to preserve, to take great care of), that is, those who love and maintain Thai culture. In the context of the ritual, there should be a tacit understanding between the performers and audiences. Even though they preserved the network of *chua saai nooraa* and shared the traditional idea of *nooraa*, the performers nevertheless communicated the new values of *nooraa*, 'Anurak Thai' to the descendants of *nooraa* performers at the ritual. In the contemporary world, despite their shared understanding, *nooraa* performers may be required to emphasise the authenticity of their tradition to their audience.

As a result of the government policy regarding the preservation of traditional culture, contemporary audiences have become aware that *nooraa* is a cultural legacy in Southern Thailand and that it should be protected. Simultaneously, *nooraa* has come to be highly regarded as traditional theatre. In recent times, the revival of tradition is becoming more prominent among professional performers. The Thai government has made efforts to uphold Thai traditions and culture and has managed to spread the idea all over the country, despite the fact that Thai people, in general, prefer more modern forms of entertainment.

Revitalisation of Tradition among Amateurs

The Thai government has stimulated interest in *nooraa* among professionals and ordinary people by authenticating it as tradition, introducing it into the education system and promoting it as a tourist attraction. As a result of cultural education, the local people who used to make up the audience have transformed themselves into performers. The last section of this paper looks at how amateur performers are maintaining the traditional art form.

Local cultural education

According to Craig Reynolds (1991), the editor of the book "National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand, 1939–1989", the Thai government has supported those kinds of music and dance that are considered part of traditional Thai culture, actively introducing them into the national education system. They have continued this effort by promoting the concept of *ekkalak* Thai (Thai identity) to the nation, in hopes of protecting Thai culture against foreign threats (Reynolds 1991: 4–14). During the late 1970s, the Office of the Prime Minister began issuing a monthly magazine entitled *Thai Identity* (*ekkalak* Thai) (Reynolds 1991: 13). Since then, education in traditional performance genres has become widespread throughout the country. At the same time, the idea of Thai identity became a popular slogan among the citizens. During the 1980s, the demand for traditional Thai art performances increased because government policy linked traditional arts with the tourist industry.

In the 1970s, schools throughout the country started introducing traditional Thai culture into their general curriculum. For example, primary and middle schools introduced the teaching of traditional Thai dance and music as a mandatory or elective course. The higher educational institutions such as the Teacher's College of Thai Dance and Music, as well as the fine arts departments at several universities, are now actively introducing Thai traditional arts courses.

At this time, the National College for Dramatic Arts has twelve campuses in Thailand and is rigorously implementing the teaching of Thai traditions. The National College for Dramatic Art has a ten-year integrated education system from middle school to bachelor degree. These schools introduced not only Thai classical dance and music but also traditional folk dance and folk music into the curriculum. Thai classical dance developed around the royal palace, while traditional folk dance employed repertoire from various parts of the country.

In the southern part of Thailand, the schools added these two types of traditional Thai performing arts, including *nooraa*.[8] The College for Dramatic Arts in the southern part of Thailand has two campuses: NakhonSiThammarat and Pattalung. Both campuses teach *nooraa* as an elective course. Instructors who teach traditional Thai dance and music are generally graduates of the College for Dramatic Arts or the fine arts departments of other universities. However, *nooraa* instructors are not necessarily graduates of any particular kind of school but are mostly current *nooraa* performers. In this way, *nooraa* performers are provided with new jobs and a new place in society as school teachers. Thus, *nooraa* presents a very rare and interesting case study within Thailand.

One of the great masters, Khun Uphatham Narakon (1891–1983), who was honoured by the Phattalung Provincial Government as 'the Artist of the South' (Guelden 2005: 187), was invited to teach *nooraa* dance at the Teacher's College in the Songkhla province in the 1960s. He was invited to teach college students for the purpose of anurak *sinlapa khaung chaao Tai* — to let the students love and be the keepers of the traditional arts of Southern Thailand (Cin Siri 1999: 9.020–3). Since the 1970s, local cultural education has spread throughout the country. As it has gained popularity, nooraa has become more open to the general public in the south. In 1974, Uphatham began teaching at the Teacher's Colleges in Songkhla and NakhonSiThammarat, where he instructed more than one hundred students (Guelden 2005: 187).

Yok Chuubua (1922–2006) is another master who has made a great contribution to the local cultural education of *nooraa.* Yok Chuubua has a rich background in the genre and once worked under Uphatham. In 1985, he was honoured with the title of National Artist by the Thai National Cultural Commission. As the only *nooraa* performer holding such a title, he is perhaps the most important individual in the world of *nooraa* in Thailand today. In 1975, he started to teach *nooraa* to college students at the University of Songkhla Province. Since then, he has been invited to various educational institutions located in NakhonSiThammarat, Phattalung and Songkhla so that he may instruct the younger generation. Due to the great efforts of *nooraa* masters like Uphatham and Yok, a new type of *nooraa* performer has appeared.

The process of teaching *nooraa* in schools is different from the traditional style of teaching. The instructors are forced to eliminate the most important elements connected to rituals, such as magical spells and incantations. School students do not need to learn any of the ritual aspects of a *nooraa* performance. They acquire the dancing techniques without learning about their spiritual meaning. Through the development of the local cultural education program, the public has been given free access to *nooraa*, which in turn has enabled *nooraa* to transform itself into a different type of performance. While the music, dancing, and singing have not changed, the lessons in schools are oriented towards the revival of traditions where the students recreate the *nooraa* as a new type of entertainment.

The diffusion of *nooraa* into educational institutions is closely tied to the tourist industry. *Nooraa* performed by young schoolgirls is in demand. In the south, *nooraa* is famous as a cultural symbol and there are many occasions for the new generation of *nooraa* performers to perform. At any event or festival, from small-scale private events to nationwide festivals, people can see *nooraa* performances. These performances are not only staged by professional groups but are also put on by semi-professional or amateur groups organised by schools. With the increase of such groups, organised through school activities, a new *nooraa* association established by the general public has emerged in recent years.

The emergence of the new group: From Khana to Khrum

At the end of December 2005, I visited the Hatyai Campus of the Prince of Songkhla University with my *nooraa* teachers, including Yok. Yok had taught *nooraa* dancing to medical science students from 1975 until 1982. One of his first students, Malaywan Phetphayaban, later became a member of the medical staff at the university hospital. In 2003, the university faculty supported her efforts to start a *nooraa* class with the help of both Yok and Suphat Naakseen. Suphat studied *nooraa* under Yok while he attended the College for Dramatic Arts in NakhonSiThammarat. Now, he is teaching both Thai classical dance and *nooraa* dancing at the school from which he graduated. On weekdays at the university, Malaywan is in charge of teaching, but during the weekend, Yok and Suphat visit to assist her.[9]

The Prince of Songkhla University has two types of *nooraa* students. The first group consists of university students, while the second is made up of outsiders or local people who reside in Songkhla province. This is a community education program provided by the university; it welcomes both adults and young children as participants. When I was there as an observer, it was New Year's Eve, and there were almost twenty young girls and boys present whose grade levels ranged from kindergarten to middle school. In the morning, the school children came together in one room for the lesson.

Figure 1 Warming-up exercises, the man standing in the middle is Suphat. (Photograph by Takako Iwasawa).

Figure 2 Performance at a department store in downtown Hatyai. (Photograph by Takako Iwasawa).

Teaching began with warming-up exercises. Dancers need to warm up their bodies in order to increase flexibility before they start to dance. *Nooraa* performers have a special method of warming-up included as part of their training (see Figure 1). With occasional help from Yok, Suphat carefully guided his pupils through the hour-long warming-up exercises. After that, the children started doing some basic dances in front of the teachers. The students were following the style of Yok, since both the director of this program, Malaywan and the co-instructor, Suphat, were disciples of Yok[10]. Both were very familiar with his method of dancing and teaching. They practiced a highly-regarded traditional dancing style.

After the lesson, the children changed into their *nooraa* costumes and left the campus for a show at the department store downtown. The young girls had been asked to perform for a New Year's event held by the store (see Figure 2). The scale of the event was not very big, and

after the dancing, one of the girls was interviewed by the emcee on the stage. The interviewer asked her how she felt about *nooraa* dance, to which the fifth grade school girl responded that it was a lot of fun. She then announced to the audience that she belonged to the *nooraa* group directed by Malaywan and she was studying under Yok.

It is surprising for me to see how Yok was able to become such a charismatic leader even for school children who do not have background as *nooraa* people in the traditional sense. This may be because he is highly-regarded and authorised as a National Artist. From this interview, I have become certain that *nooraa* is perceived as an element of the cultural heritage of Southern Thailand. The civic involvement of ordinary people in this performing art has heralded the coming of a new type of *nooraa* into the contemporary world.

In 2003, as *nooraa* lessons resumed at the Prince of Songkhla University, Malaywan established a new *nooraa* group named *khrum anurak sinlapa phunbaan* (manooraa), which means 'the association for local culture (*nooraa*)'. Most of the members taking classes at the university belonged to her group. The main difference between this and other *nooraa* troupes lies in the name. This group uses the word *khrum*, while the other troupes use the word *khana*.[11] I asked Suphat what is the difference between *khana* and *khrum*. He answered that 'the word *khana* refers to the professional *nooraa* troupe in a traditional sense, but Malaywan practices in a different style compared to the usual *nooraa* troupes. I assume she used the word *khrum* in order to make a clear distinction between the two forms.' For certain, Malaywan's group focuses on teaching the younger amateurs the physical movements for the dancing and singing. It has a tendency to put aside the ritual aspects of the performance so that ordinary people will be increasingly able to enter this highly exclusive world. Regardless of these methods, her group does not completely disregard tradition but rather is oriented towards the revival of tradition. This idea is closely related to Malaywan's origins.

Malaywan was born into the *nooraa* family of *chua saai nooraa*. Her paternal grandfather was a *nooraa* performer, Manooraa Wan Sukkheason, who had been Yok's teacher. His troupe was named *khana manooraa wan*. Malaywan's father eventually took over the troupe. After the death of both her grandfather and her father, the troupe that had been headed by her family disappeared. While she was a college student at the Prince of Songkhla University, it was only natural that she should attend the *nooraa* class taught by Yok. She experienced one of the rites of passage offered by Yok, through which she was properly recognised as a professional stage performer. In spite of this great experience, she did not establish her own troupe for a long time. This was likely due to the fact that she is a woman. Although the population of female *nooraa* increased exponentially during the first half of the twentieth century, even today this highly exclusive society does not give female *nooraa* the permission to become ritual masters. The senior male *nooraa* maintains the male-dominated system and the female *nooraa* are excluded from the most sacred roles. With Thai society promoting the preservation of traditional culture, Malaywan decided to establish a new type of group based on local amateur performers. She is the only person who is able to continue on in the family tradition as an actual descendant of a *nooraa* family. As a female, she cannot become the master to lead the troupe and thus she needs to find another method of succession.

This helps us better understand Malaywan's decision to discard the traditional *nooraa* term, *khana* and use *khrum* instead, and why she needed Yok's assistance in order to train pupils with wide-ranging backgrounds. Yok is the most highly regarded *nooraa* performer, the person with the most authority and power in the *nooraa* performing world. Under his influence, her activities and her pupils were secure in society. One year after her group was established, Malaywan held a ritual with Yok as the ritual master. The ritual was an occasion for her pupils to be acknowledged as stage performers. The young girls who performed at the department store in downtown Hatyai, were also among those who experienced this ritual. In this way, Malaywan's pupils can now be recognised as professional *nooraa*. However, their activities so

far do not include ritual performances based on communication with spiritual beings. It was for this reason that Malaywan chose not to use the word *khana* for her group. Her intention in starting the group was to preserve traditional *nooraa* performance. Malaywan's amateur group, supported by master Yok and his great authority as a National Artist, has become a highly recognised organisation in society. This unique organisation, which is not a formal troupe but is rather a civic organisation geared toward the preservation of tradition, is able to stand on its own without being completely excluded from a male-dominated society. If Malaywan had decided to establish her troupe according to the former professional style, she might have been forced to get involved in a conflict with senior male *nooraa* performers, as most female performers do. Although she could have been a troupe leader, she would never have been accepted as a ritual master. By choosing to name her group *khrum*, she has been able to remove her group from the traditional framework. This has enabled her to aggressively emphasise the positive mission of making a contribution to society and its citizens.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have focused on how *nooraa*, which is a traditional performance art as well as a cultural symbol in contemporary Southern Thailand, is being preserved, and how it has been adapted to modern Thai culture.

As shown in Table 1, new styles have been developed by both professionals and amateurs. In the traditional context, professional performers perform the *nooraa roong khruu* ritual, and otherwise, the traditional *nooraa* are performed for rituals and entertainment.

Categories	**Performances**	**New challenges by professionals**	**Amateur group**
Nooraa roong khruu	Ritual performance	*Beap booraan*	
	Entertainment show		
Others	Entertainment show	*Beap booraan*	Malaywan's challenge
			nooraa in schools
		Beap saakhon	
In the traditional context		In the contemporary context	

Table 1 Changes in *nooraa* at the present time.

On the other hand, contemporary *nooraa* performances can be categorised into two types: traditional *nooraa* (beap booraan) and modern *nooraa* (beap saakhon). In the contemporary context, *nooraa* performers have preserved the traditional ritual, *nooraa roong khruu*. However, in other types of entertainment, many changes have been made. Professional performers have developed the modern style, *beap saakhon*. At the same, a new movement for the revival of tradition, known as Anurak Thai, has occurred. Amateur performers have emerged to contribute to the revitalisation of this tradition.

Professional performers have been maintaining the type of *nooraa* performance that was taught by their teachers. Through both performance and ritual, they are able to share the art with audience-members who have the same cultural identity, called *chua saai nooraa*. However, along with current trends in social change, the framework of tradition is starting to change as well. Due to modernisation and globalisation, along with educational reform and nationalism, traditional art is evolving into a communal heritage for the people of the region.

Such transformations have enabled a wide variety of people to participate in *nooraa*. School children are now able to learn about the local culture through their own physical experiences, disregarding the spiritual aspects of the performance. The amateur group, which is organised by the general public, has started to create a new way of getting involved in the world of *nooraa* through physical practices and the cultivation of a relationship with the cultural authorities. With the emergence of these new performers, professional artists are being compelled to reassess what they do. When *nooraa* changes into a performance accessible to anyone, the issue arises of how authenticity will be redefined. This will inspire every *nooraa* performer to generate new interpretations of spiritual rites and new types of creations.

Notes

1. The Malaysian version is called *menora*, which is known as a form of folk dance theatre, found in the northern Peninsular Malaysia states of Kedah, Penang and Kelantan (Matusky and Tan 2004: 100). The two types of performances — *nooraa* and *menorah* — have similarities in the stories, costumes, musical instruments and dance postures. However, they are different in terms of the languages used by the clown characters who appear in both forms. A comparative study of these two performance types will be of great value, but in this paper, I will focus on the Southern Thai version of *nooraa*.

2. Although troupes once travelled from town to town throughout the south and often stayed in monasteries, today most troupes have a home base and only travel short distances to perform (Guelden 2005: 186).

3. It is very hard to distinguish professionals and amateurs. Simply put, we understand that professional performers are people who can make money through their expertise and the latter are those who cannot. However, this definition is not always effective as you can easily imagine. In this case, I would like to briefly define the two words: a professional is the person who belongs to the

traditional *nooraa* troupe and has the experience to be regarded as a stage performer in a traditional sense. An amateur is the person who cannot be categorised as a professional.

4. Even now, this kind of magical power is allowed only for a male *nooraa* master to use.

5. The paper written by Ginsburg was published in 1972. His research appears to have been done in the 1960s. The trends during his research do not always fit the current one.

6. *Ngaan duan sip* (the tenth month festival) is held by southern Thai people to make offerings to their ancestors at the end of the tenth month of the lunar calendar. The southern Thai people believe that with the permission of Yama, the King of Hell, ancestors come back to this world to reunite with their descendants (Phonsak Phromkaeo 1999: 1337). In order to welcome back the departed souls, many Buddhist temples in the south hold a ceremony, where the local people bring various kinds of offerings to pray to the spirits of their ancestors. In the city centre they hold an annual event to celebrate this Buddhist custom.

7. *Tham bot* (*tham*: doing; *bot*: text) is the dance which expresses the meaning of the song text. It is the most highly regarded (Udom Nuuthaung 2536/1993: 188).

8. It is interesting to note that students cannot learn *nooraa* dance except in Southern Thailand.

9. After Yok Chuubua passed away in 2006, his disciple, Suphat, took over his role.

10. Originally, *nooraa* dancing was individually transmitted from teacher to disciple. Therefore, *nooraa* performers know that many versions of dancing styles exist in the southern part of Thailand.

11. For instance, the troupe headed by Yok is named *khana nooraa yok thaleenoi*. The *nooraa* troupes are usually named after leaders or their hometowns. In the case of Yok's troupe, he chose to include his own name (Yok) and the name of his hometown (Thaleenoi). He was born in Thaleenoi village, Khuankhanun district, Phattalung province.

References

Note: Thailand observes the Buddhist-era calendar. The year of publication of the sources from Thailand are cited according to both the Thai and Western calendars. They are separated by a slash mark (/).

Cin Siri. 1999. UphathamNaraakon. In *Saranukrom Watthanatham Thai: Phak Tai* (*Encyclopedia of Thai Culture: Southern Region*). Bangkok: Siam Press Management, 18: 9020–9024.

Ginsburg, Henry D. 1972. Manora dance-drama: An introduction. *The Journal of the Siam Society* 60(2): 169–181. Bangkok, Thailand: The Sompong Press Ltd.

Guelden, Marlane. 2005. Spirit mediumship in Southern Thailand: The feminization of Nora ancestral possession. *Dynamic Diversity in Southern Thailand*, edited by Wattna Sugunnasil, Prince of Songkhla University. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 179–212.

Matusky, Patricia and Tan Sooi Beng. 2004. *The Music of Malaysia: The Classical, Folk and Syncretic Traditions*. SOAS Musicology Series. Aldershot: Ashgate Press.

Suphat Naakseen. 2539/1996. Nooraa: Ramakhianphraai-Yiapluukmanaao. Master of Arts thesis, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

Phonsak. Phromkaeo. 1999. Ngaan Duan Sip Muang NakhonSiThammarat (in Thai). In *Saranukrom Watthanatham Thai: Phak Tai (Encyclopedia of Thai Culture: Southern Region)*. Bangkok: Siam Press Management, 3: 1337–1340.

Reynolds, Craig J. 1991. Introduction: National identity and its defenders. In *National Identity and its defenders Thailand*, 1939–1989, edited by Craig J. Reynolds. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 1–39.

Udom Nuuthaung. 2536/1993. *Nooraa. Mahawithayalay Srinakharinwirot Phaak Tai*. Songkhla, Thailand: Srinakharinwirot University Press.