

THE ROOTS OF FUTURE BLOOMING: YOUTH THEATRE IN THAILAND FROM THE TWENTIETH TO THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

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Introduction

For several centuries, young people have been integral to Thailand's theatre audiences and performance traditions. They have also been integral to other aspects of Thai community life. Since performances have always been community or court-sponsored events, whole families (including children) took part in the production and staging of performances, as well as forming their audiences.

Performances created specifically for young people are a twentieth-century development. With the arrival of films, videos, and TV in recent decades at festival times and at home, young people have access to a much wider variety of theatre forms than their parents did. And, since 1980, more kids have had a chance to see live performance through one of the several touring theatre companies for young people that have been in operation since that time.

The landscape of today's performance culture in Thailand is quite different from that of a century ago. Old forms of

performance have changed and new forms have been imported or arisen spontaneously. Moreover, the new disciplines of education, childhood development, child psychology and sociology have changed views about, expectations of, and demands from young people in the last few decades. Mandatory schooling has come to occupy the largest chunk of children's lives, with interaction with the mass media (especially TV) as a close second. Children's lives and their entertainment options are now much different from those of the past.

This paper explores some aspects of the changing relationships between Thailand's performance traditions and young people in Thailand, focusing on the development of "theatre for young people." I first provide a brief account of how the children's lives and the life of theatre changed since around the year 1900, then outline the emergence in Thailand (under the influence of the USA and UK systems) of educational theatre from 1974, and reflect on the next two generations of those involved with theatre for young people. Although based in Thailand and using some Thai elements, most of the ideas and practices of educational theatre (which focuses on

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teaching children creatively to express themselves) were transplanted to Thailand by those educated abroad. They ignored both the principles and practices guiding Thailand's native theatre traditions, as well as the variety of needs and aims of Thai young people. Nonetheless, this foreign import was a watershed, encouraging new thinking about how approaches to theatre and children can interact.

1. CLASSICAL AND FOLK ROOTS OF THAI EDUCATIONAL THEATRE: A Century of Continuity and Change

More than a century ago, King Rama V (1868-1910) led the country into a new era by opening the country to foreign-born ideas of governance, social organization and education. Besides, abolishing slavery, King Chulalongkorn began public schooling through a new public educational system. The new exposure to western understanding and practices also changed old forms of drama and added new forms to the repertoire.² Many new forms of Dance-Drama borrowed both form and content from older traditions, as well as from new types of theatre from western countries. For instance, the Khon and Lakhorn Ram (Dance-Drama) in this period was shortened to a mere 3 to 4 hour performance. The

productions were also divided into acts and scenes. Each used sets painted in three-dimensional perspective with designs and lighting. Longer dialogues in contemporary, conversational prose were added to the scripts and narrative lyrics were cut out. Dance movements became simpler. Realistic gestures replaced dance movements. New musical arrangements were performed in order to communicate better the feeling of character and the atmosphere. Eventually, at the end of the century, long prose pieces developed into spoken drama using both prose and poetry.

King Rama VI (1910-1925) continued the open-door policies of his father, and made more contacts with western countries and their people. In the performing arts, King Vajiravudh was the first to introduce spoken drama for an educational purpose³. In particular, the king used drama and theatre as tools to teach and promote western ideas such as democracy, a state constitution, and patriotism. This educational use of theatre can be seen in retrospect to be the key movement of modern educational theatre in Thailand. As well as the new form discussed above, King Rama VI also introduced politics into his Royal Khon productions. A special school under his Royal patronage was founded for the sons of officials and middle class-families to receive free

² During the nineteenth century, there were many new and modernized forms developed from these traditional forms of Dance-Drama, such as Lakhorn Dukdamban (from Lakhorn Nai and Lakhorn Nok), Lakhorn Phan-thang (from Lakhorn Nok), Lakhorn Rong (Thai operetta), and Likay (folk dance drama). See: Mattani M. Rutnin, *Dance Drama and Theatre in Thailand*, p. 6.

³ King Vajiravudhi's plays were written in prose. He is given most of credit for the development of the new genre. He was able to make his plays acceptable to elite society. He also introduced social realism and political ideas in his plays, particularly on the concepts of nationalism and loyalty to the monarchy. It was only after his reign ended that these modern plays caught on among the public.

formal education and Khon training. This school became the foundation of the later Academy of Dance and Music in the next decade.

The Revolution of 1932 replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy. The main change in the performing arts was that the Royal Entertainment and Royal Khon were moved to a new bureaucratic agency called the Krom Silpakorn (the Department of Fine Arts) charged with performing the cultural activities of Ministry of Education. The Cultural heritage thus became public property and was no longer attached to the monarchy.⁴ In 1934, a school for training in classical music and dance, was formed after the French model of Ecole des Beaux Arts and Academie de Danse et Musique. The Academy of Dance and Music was found to train dancers and musicians in the place of the private training by the royal household. Later it was called Wittayalai Nattasin (Academy of the Arts of Dancing).

The new government gathered former royal artists and musicians to work at the Academy as teachers, and together they designed the arts curriculum for the academy. The curriculum aimed to teach all of the performing arts in the Khon and Lakhorn forms. In so doing it set new standards for both beauty and tradition in the performing arts. There were masters put in place from Khon, Court-based dance drama, and the popular folk theatre of Central Thailand. This united the interests in the Department of Fine Arts and the Academy, and thereafter it became the center or standards of quality in the

Performing Arts.⁵ It was at this time that Thai arts and culture changed its nature and structure to become the vehicle public entertainment with explicitly educational values.

After 1932, commercial theatres favored more light hearted, and melodramatic pieces, while the Dance–Drama pieces under Department of Fine Arts became more political. During the rule of the Field Marshal Phibun Songkram, many patriotic musical plays based on history were used as powerful propaganda tools by the government. The Field Marshal did not support the popular theatre much, and forced the popular artists to develop their performance to match the standard of the Department of Fine Arts. Patriotic theme songs from these plays were repeated on the radio and taught in schools, especially during World War II and the Indo-China War. Many popular theatre troupes also put on productions that presented patriotic themes and became more contemporary in their music and costume.

Folk and local traditions have always rooted themselves in local communities and regional circuits, and the frequent changes of government have had little effect on their support. Between 1932 and the 1970s, the expanding state education system meant that local and regional theatre traditions could only survive with substantial local support. Some of them have languished over the decades, unable to adapt to the rapidly changing tastes, expectations, and demands of Thai society. National television and radio broadcasts helped make the living heirs to these local

⁴ Rutnin, *Dance, Drama, and Theatre in Thailand*, p. 189.

⁵ Sukanya Patrachai and Pornrat Damrhung. *Folk Drama in Central Thailand: Adjustment to Modernization*. (In Thai). 1997, p. 50

traditions widely known to the general public, and the recording industry and promoters of live concerts—despite their tendency to erase many of the local subtleties and package the performers in unsavory ways—did some things to make local and folk culture part of the public imagination.

Around 1980, the government established a cultural commission under the Education Ministry charged with preserving, promoting, and staging the work of local folk artists. Also, the government built the Cultural Center, and took some positive steps in promoting locally-grown traditions, and staging performing traditions of foreign countries. By lumping together responsibilities for both the local and the foreign traditions into a relatively minor agency, the government now recognizes—yet still slights—the value and vitality of Thailand's old folk heritage and more recently adopted traditions from foreign countries.

The many teachers' colleges (Rajapattra Institutes) set up all over the country have helped the cultural commission in its work. They prepare and train teachers for local schools and emphasize folk dances, music, and drama. By contrast, local schools—as part of the massive Education Ministry—are staffed with state officials, whose allegiance, awareness, and responsiveness is more to the central government than to the needs and resources of local communities

The Wittayalai Nattasin has become the main site for training those charged with preserving and enhancing the most traditional and rigorous forms of Thai classical dance. While there are nine schools located throughout Thailand, its

headquarters is in Bangkok. The artists working and training in these schools bear the burden of keeping Thailand's traditional court-based performing arts alive and well for future generations. Although the local academies do more to support folk dance and drama, they still reflect more influences from the classical and usually lack the creativity and understanding of local folk dance, music, and local popular theatres. The graduates would rather work in schools and tourist businesses than in the local communities with local artists, who usually receive little respect.

The various classical Thai dance forms are beautiful and meaningful arts which should be taught to future generations of dancers and also to the audiences, not only for the sense they give of cultural continuity and national identity, but also for their intrinsic beauty and subtlety of expression. But simple preservation, with a lack of creative attitudes towards arts and culture administration in this dynamic, changing, and more close-knit world will make them little more than museum-pieces.

Commercial values and simplified techniques have helped to isolate classical dance from its real value and intrinsic beauty. The inability of the Department of Fine Arts and the Wittayalai Nattasilp to produce well-trained, highly qualified and innovative dancers has left the young generation with the dilemma of trying to produce work that succeeds in preserving old values while speaking to the next generation. The bureaucratic institutions have not yet served the schools and communities well enough to nurture the pride in local or national culture in the younger generations.

While court-based traditions have always received official recognition, folk and popular performances have (until recently) survived solely on local audience appreciation. Besides the local and regional patronage networks which sponsor rougher, spontaneous live performances, the mass media's ability to record performances has also proven valuable for distributing edited and more polished versions of the folk performing arts more to a wider public, and for generating fan clubs and additional support among local communities. Much of both the substance and vitality of Thai performance culture resides in these local and folk traditions.

In short, the shift in the last century from court-based nobility to a state bureaucracy has led to many changes in young's people lives and in Thailand theatre's traditions. Young people spend a long time in schools, but schools have failed to connect them to their traditions and cultures. The state has failed to find ways of keeping these traditions strong and open to young peoples' theatre. For this one can turn to universities, since they were the first to adopt curricula for western drama in Thailand, and they continue to be innovative sites for the linking of education and theatre today.

2. SOWING THE SEEDS OF MODERN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE IN THAILAND: Onchuma YUTHAVONG's Creative Dramatics, 1974-1982

In 1974 Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of the Arts (in Bangkok) became the first Thai university to begin a Children's Drama and Theatre for Young People's Theatre in Education curriculum.

Onchuma YUTHAVONG spearheaded the effort there and in the country. As well as writing the curriculum and starting the program in the university, she also garnered support for these ideas and practices in the mass media and in local communities. A decade after its introduction, this approach had become widely accepted in Thailand and integrated into several nationally-prominent institutions.

Besides teaching and actively training people in young people's theatre and creative drama at Chulalongkorn University, Onchuma also oversaw the creation of several influential pieces in children's theatre and puppetry each semester. Through her own efforts and those of the people she trained, theatre for young people has become a commonplace in the public imagination and among policy-makers. It has also become even more acceptable as faculties at some other universities have begun offering new courses in creative dramatics and theatre for young people. Significant among these is the major program in theatre for young people begun in 1979 by Wandee LYMPIWATTANA at Thammasat University in Bangkok.

Onchuma's enthusiasm and warm personality ensured that her broad-based efforts to sow the seeds of theatre for young people in Thailand fell on fertile ground. Sowing the seeds of freedom, creativity and energy at this time, was the right moment for the university population was ready to bloom and work more in this direction.

Gradually, the ideas and practices of "creative dramatics" and "children's theatre" inspired by Western countries that first took root in Bangkok through

the seeds planted by Onchuma and her students began to spread to other towns and cities in Thailand, as well as in more remote rural areas, largely through the influenced mass media. One of the fruits of the seeds that Onchuma planted nearly a quarter century ago is the project called "HOON HANSA" ("Joyful Puppets"), which was aired on Channel Four from 1977 to 1982. It brought the practice of children's theatre and drama education to many outside the Bangkok metropolitan area. This project became, through the mass media, a seminal example of how to blend young people, theatre, and the ideas of creative dramatics. "HOON HANSA" is widely considered one of the best offerings for children's programming in Thailand. Other examples of the fruits of Onchuma's work include the many examples of creative writing for young people's theatre and for puppet plays that have also been published over the years, helping to make these forms and the ideas on which they are based more acceptable and desirable to the general public.

Influenced by Onchuma's creativity, energy, and hard work, the first generation of children's theatre practitioners have become the main people in the theatre for young people during the last two decades. Many are still working hard in this area. Among the most important figures are: Daraka Chavalit WONGSIRI and Sangarun KARNCHANARAT at DASS Entertainment (whose production company makes two productions for young people a year), and Kiatsuda Panichkarn PIROM producer and artistic director of the best educational puppetry group in Thailand, called "JAO KHUN THONG," which aims to create puppet shows with a strong Thai cultural imprint. Its run on television marks it as the highest-ranking

children's program in Thailand over the last decade. Working with Onchuma after she had started her children's theatre company, Pornrat DAMRHUNG began a touring theatre company to bring young people's theatre to children in remote rural Thailand. And in the past year the Department of Dramatic Arts began the first graduate-level program in theatre for young people in Thailand at Chulalongkorn University.

Perhaps the most important step in the recognition of children's theatre and creative dramatics occurred in 1982. That was when they become part of the curriculum used in teachers' training schools. By 1990, theatre for young people had become so widespread and interesting to education policy-makers and teachers that it came to form part of the programs offered by teachers at the nursery and kindergarten levels of the education system, as well. In part, the this latter group was influenced by the children's programming found in such educational TV shows as SESAME STREET and the MUPPET SHOW. The actual practice of these teachers involves teaching about plays, characters, roles, puppetry and performances with a lot of audience participation. In addition, the Chulalongkorn University Department of Dramatic Arts ran three annual workshops between 1982 and 1984 for teachers from all over the country to learn more about creative dramatics and children's theatre.

3. VOLUNTEERS THEATRE TROUPES TRANSPLANT EDUCATIONAL THEATRE SEEDLINGS TO RURAL THAILAND: Fruits of the Urban

Struggles for Freedom (1980-1992)

After the push for more political freedom in Thailand between 1973 and 1976, Thais regularly recognized young people's aspirations and needs as integral part of their society. When the political demonstrations of university students came to a bloody end in October 1976, both the government and the general public realized that young people were an important constituency which could no longer be ignored. During this time, there was also a spirit of more openness and freedom among young people, who saw themselves as a generation of promise, a feeling fostered by general public opinion. This generated more governmental and public support for new programs and activities geared toward young people. Still, the image of a stronger and freer youth was reserved mainly for those living in Bangkok. Young people outside the Thai capital still lagged far behind in the opportunities and resources for advancement.

Thepsiri SOOKSOPA,⁶ was a key person who made bringing young peoples' theatre to rural and remote places a priority. This political and social activist conveyed positive ideas for young people through story-telling. He walked from village to village, telling stories and sometimes bringing new films with him for the village to watch, providing something of novelty and excitement to their difficult and often drab lives far from the cities. He also introduced the practice of MOBILE LIBRARIES, which not only brought books

from village to village, but also eager young amateur performing artists, who sought both to entertain and educate villagers. These mobile libraries became a major transportation channel for the new touring theatre companies.

In this period of political activity at the end of the 1976, educational and cultural activities aimed at young people—especially live drama and theatre—came to the forefront. They were not centered in cities, but crisscrossed the countryside villages on an *ad hoc* basis. Besides attempting to maintain the channels of communication and understanding with rural villages, these efforts cooperated with parallel efforts made by many university students or recent graduates to help bring about rural development in remote lowland and hill tribe villages.

In 1981 young people started a touring theatre company for young people living in rural areas, with the support of Thepsiri, which was unprecedented in Thailand. The young peoples' theatre groups of today—MAYA led by Santi JITTRAJINDA, MAKHAM POM led by Vilada VANADURONGWAN, and the Arts Theatre Touring Company of Pornrat DAMRHUNG—all have connections with this first attempt.

All of the touring theatre companies began by using simple and easy forms such as puppetry and story-telling to bring a bit of culture to remote places. Doing so brought them in direct contact with poor health care practices, social problems, moral issues, and extreme poverty, which they began addressing in their plays. Regular touring also forced these groups to be very flexible and spontaneous in their productions, as well as making them

⁶ Author's interview with Thepsiri SOOKSOPA, 1995.

experiment with more elaborate and sophisticated systems of theatre practice and management, including marketing and image-building strategies. Over a period of several years, each touring theatre company developed its own unique identity and style.⁷

Touring theatre companies in Thailand can be thought of as modern touring theatre companies in that they have created a clear place in contemporary society. Their uneven success derives from the fact that they have managed to understand and express a sense familiar to Thai people, they provide free performances for the host communities and most productions are subsidized by other patrons, such as non-government organizations.

Both the MAYA and MAKHOM POM⁸ teams are still very successful, and consist of professional theatre people as well as volunteers. Their long years of working with different audiences have given them a deep feeling and sympathy for rural audiences' expectations and preferences in theatre. Their experience has also taught them to insert traditional elements into their pieces in order to highlight important social and health issues, such as children's rights, traditional culture, drug problems, sex education, and teen pregnancy, as well as AIDS and other communicable diseases. While MAYA chooses to focus on presenting pleasant stories for kids and to stress the multi-experience approaches curriculum for young people, MAKHAM

POM believes that issue-oriented performances are important for school children.

The touring theatre company tradition, characterizing the second phase of educational theatre in Thailand, still centered in Bangkok, today includes MAKHAM POM, which deals with issue-plays on AIDS, drugs addiction, holds disadvantages teens workshop; KRAJIDRID, which deals with sex education and attitudes towards sex among young people; KRAJOK NGAO ("Mirror"), which deals mainly with projects for and with young people in the slum areas of Bangkok; CARAVAN, which works more with mobile libraries in slum areas; and the INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENTAL ARTS or MAYA work through teacher workshops and develops education curricula for disadvantaged children emphasizing traditional Thai ways of creativity.

Today more than 200 young people work with these theatre troupes, performing each year before students, orphans and disadvantaged children, and also senior citizens. These troupes now have learnt how to win support of government agencies, and as well as receive funding from social services, informal education sources and foreign organizations in Australia, Japan, Norway, German and Canada. These groups continue to work hard, serving Thai society in the ways they know best through the experience of long years of touring. Each troupe has developed its own strengths and own repertoire of techniques to reach its audiences. Although these techniques may be used to push ideas and themes in the often heavy-handed way demanded by their patrons, they also provide opportunities for young

⁷ P. Damrhung. "Children's Theatre: Touring Theatre to Rural Areas." *Young Sodsai*. 1995, pp. 74-77.

⁸ Author's interview with S.Kanha (MAYA) and P. Prasarthong (MAKHAMPOM), 1995.

people to experience and to share their ideas and feelings with people at all levels of society.

Troupes traveling frequently to local areas have found it effective to include Thai elements and stories that are close to their audiences, including Thai music and dance. This aids them in communicating their information and themes. In recent years some younger performers have seen a need to search more deeply, trying to create a type of theatre for young people which is not simply issue-oriented. These performers like to use plays to explore new issues in alternative areas, such as personal identity, the environment and forest preservation, children's problems and ways to strengthen reading habits. Yet they still long for the day when theatre for young people can become a permanent job for them. They are mature, experienced, well-disciplined, and would like to find a more sustainable way to create a long-term job for their life.

The above theatre companies and their members have already led to various performances and related activities in schools in rural areas, for disadvantaged kids, in orphanages, for homeless children, and those working with these children and on their behalf. Then includes camping, training in theatre and cultural activities for the children as well as fundamentals such as teaching them to read and write, and becoming a friend to whom they can turn in times of trouble for a caring ear, advice, and help when needed.

During 1990s, the push for these activities has been gathering momentum in both cities and regions in the countryside. Local communities have begun taking more of an initiative in making sure that their young people have adequate opportunities

and resources. In large cities like NAKORN RAJASIMA, SONKLA, PETCHBUREE, AYUDHAYA, CHIANGMAI, and KHONKAEN, troupes of young people have been using live drama in their areas to teach and entertain. They have also begun using the mass media to reach those who are unable to attend the live performance, aiming to help those with fewer opportunities and to create new networks of friends and encouraging the realisation that there are others out there who care about them. Most of these programs are funded by local foundations or foreign organizations. More work on building up networks for exchanging information and ideas need to be done to coordinate the somewhat piecemeal efforts now going on.

4. WEEDING, PRUNING AND GRAFTING FOR FUTURE GROWTH: Problems and Prospects for Drama and Theatre for Young People (ca. 1992-present)

The efforts of many individuals and groups in the last quarter-century have created a place in the Thai public imagination and institutions for educational theatre. However, these substantial efforts have yet to make full use of Thai cultural and performance traditions and their practitioners. These efforts have produced two important achievements to date. First, after becoming the undergraduate curriculum at Chulalongkorn University in 1974-1994,⁹ and then at Thammasat University in 1979, the Educational Theatre

⁹ Educational Theatre is now in Graduate Program since 1997.

program went on and became a part of the Department of Drama and Theatres in other universities and Rajapattra Institutes (formerly Teachers' Colleges), and came to be thought of a subject for teachers training at all levels. Second, from 1981, independent travelling theatre troupes began moving through rural areas, having now become well established non-profit organizations.

Now in the 1990s, new efforts are underway, which both build on earlier efforts and attempt new initiatives. These efforts have three main aims:

First, to expand the number of motivated and highly-qualified **people** involved in theatre for young people; second, to increase the amount and quality of usable **resources** for theatre for young people; and finally, to provide a more accurate, comprehensive, and critical **perspectives** on Thai theatre culture and its relations to young people in Thai society today. This section outlines some of the problems in the areas of **people, resources, and perspectives**, and then details some promising initiatives addressing these problems.

PROBLEMS

PEOPLE; PRACTITIONERS, TEACHERS & OTHERS

The most pressing problem today is the shortage of people who are both highly-motivated and highly-qualified. This problem stems, in part, from the fact that many involved until the 1980s have relied on their previous successes, and in part due to barriers blocking communication

and exchange between all the relevant parties.

Sometimes practitioners and teachers not only have different aims, but also lack the right training and the right resources and perspectives to reach their goals. In addition to these two core groups, however, it is also important to involve those who have mastered the court-based and folk performing arts and teachers in drama/theatre departments, people working in the mass media (especially TV and the press), organizations and institutions interested in children's issues, and governmental and non-governmental agencies. I focus here on the problems in the two core groups—practitioners and teachers—and then suggest some projects and programs to address them.

To help prepare the way for needed curriculum changes from university-level and teachers' college level down to the primary schools (which will be slow in coming), improving the skill levels of teachers at all levels of the school system should be a priority. This can be done through workshops and training courses which make use of "experts" in the three main areas of performance for young people which have governmental recognition at present: the classical, folk, and modern (mostly Western) traditions, which have many contributions to make to each other. This will encourage local schools to make use of local and regional artists and their traditions, as well as artists who have mastered the court-based traditions, and the smaller number of those who have learned modern approaches to performance. This should also encourage school teachers to look outside the school walls to their local communities for those with valuable performance skills to teach.

Besides the local artists, the touring companies are important pools of human talent and ambition. But their members, too, should receive more training in the garden of Thai performance culture.

RESOURCES; MATERIALS & MEDIA

Equally essential to improving the number and quality of people involved in theatre for young people are the production and distribution of better resources for practitioners, teachers, students, and researchers. The current textbooks and classroom materials are inadequate, especially when recognizing that those expected to use them have not had the right training. More translations, studies and original works should be published for Thai audiences.

Moreover, a better attempt at publicizing the efforts of young people's theatre will have to be made. This will also require more publicity of public education and not just school education, and it will be important to have the ideas written in books in greater detail than has been done to date, recorded on audio and video tapes and disseminated through workshops, newspapers and curricula changes.

Thailand has developed a full range of commercial television, video, and radio programming in the mass media. Unfortunately, these programs focus on entertaining young people with cartoons and other shows which center too much on violence, and rampant consumerism. While many of these come from foreign countries, they fit in well with many of the social and economic patterns existing in Thailand, and are widely watched and

appreciated by young people. These exciting programs—and the videos and products marketed along with them—tend to overshadow the fine local children's programming available and distort the earlier ideas of what children's programming sought to achieve. It is now harder to find shows with simple stories, serious ideas, and less expensive practices than ten years ago. Replacing them are programs which organize themselves around commercialism and light entertainment. Most TV programs for young people have the appearance of fairy tales, unreal life and game shows that laughter usually comes at the expense of other children's mistakes or pain. These include a large proportion of the shows for children made for young people in foreign countries such as Japan and the USA.

Translations of key books and reports that have appeared in other countries on the underlying approaches and philosophy of children's theatre. This will help to relate these ideas to other aspects of child development and public education. Books using these perspectives that are filled with usable examples are also needed for teachers (and practitioners) to try at different grade levels. They will be used not only to develop youth theatre for practitioners, but also for teachers to become more aware of the trends in Thai society and the potential changes that are happening in other places in the world. Since action in local communities affects young people as well as regional and national institutions and exchanges, it is important to keep abreast of those elements which have an impact on children's issues and on theatre. Yet Thailand is part of the global environment—now more than ever—and so its citizens need to remain aware of some of the changes and

developments which affect them or offer them new alternatives to current ways of behavior. Young people interested in theatre for others younger than themselves should have the opportunity to learn in an environment which supports their creative impulses while teaching them to be more critical in their thinking and in their assessment of their performances so that they will have the confidence to pursue their projects and dreams in an often unfriendly, difficult, and sometimes dangerous world.

Also needed are more course materials which show how native forms of theatre—whether rooted in the court or in the provinces—can communicate meaningful ideas and patterns to young people. Instead of teaching classical forms to a majority of children who will never master them through repetition and discipline, the focus instead should be on ways to make them appreciate and enjoy these forms. Studying the main characters and the main movements of various characters in the classical tradition need not be painful.

PERSPECTIVES; THEATRE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

To date, those involved in theatre for young people in Thailand have not paid enough attention to the full range and contexts of Thailand's performance traditions. Neither have they had a full enough appreciation of the range of problems and possibilities for young people in different regions and in different social strata.

It is now time to begin imagining a new way of doing young people's theatre in Thailand, one which uses performance traditions as tools to instill in young

people with both the realities and the possibilities for the lives of the next generation. This will require a better understanding of the "garden of Thai performance culture" and of the range of young Thais' problems and prospects. It is important to recognize the differences and the similarities involved in classical traditions, folk traditions, and modern (mostly Western) traditions. Each of these three areas has different modes of performing, different ways of training, and different types of organization which need to be understood and appreciated. It is also important to recognize that in Thailand a wide gap exists between the rich and the poor, and between those living in the city and those in the country.

As a start, a better system for teaching drama for young people needs to be implemented at the school level. This better system should acknowledge the following items. First, that there are differences between drama/theatre in the western sense and the those more familiar to Thai modes of dramatic expression and education. Second, we have to realize more about the distinctive social and cultural patterns in Thailand, including its rules, expectations, the rationale of its educational policies. Third, we have to make renewed efforts to publicize and plan well in the actual implementation of drama/theatre into Thailand's schools. And fourth, we need a clearer understanding of the process of child development and how this affects the aims and implementation of the school curriculum.

A fundamental problem is that in most schools around the country there is very little understanding of the process and craft needed to put a piece of drama or

theatre onstage. Instead the focus on theatre-as-product ignores the myriad problems of coordination, teamwork, and refining judgment among a group of people needed to make drama, despite being widely recognized as a valuable tool to offer advantages to young people. While it is true that all can do theatre, theatre is always based on the skills, training, practice, and talents of those involved. Teaching and learning theatre should allow students to be able to see theatre not so much as a product but as an artistic process in which they can participate with team work and creativity.

It is important for efforts in theatre for young people in Thailand to accept and promote the classical (court-based) and folk (local) arts, with their traditional forms, motifs, and stories along with the interests in finding ways to use western approaches to theatrical expression.

This should be part of a larger effort to teach today's young people to feel and learn their own cultural and artistic traditions, including the theatre arts in both Classical and Folk forms. It is very important that the people in this country have the opportunity to realize more about the traditions which they have done much to shape, create, and pass on from generation to generation, rather than those forms of art and culture that have become part of Thai culture only through buying them ready-made from other places. As many have come to see recently, one cannot borrow an identity for oneself.

PROSPECTS

In today's world people suffer from bursting economic bubbles, uncertain

futures, a rise in the random, groundless acts of violence played up in the press and brought too close to young people lives. Moreover, many of those we would like to respect—corrupt bureaucratic officials and politicians—have left many with little hope and little expectation of pursuing a meaningful life in society or in working to help others. Can anything be done about this grim situation facing young people today? Whatever the past has demonstrated and future may seem to hold, creative and high-quality education remains the most appropriate response. Helping young people become more aware of the durable realities and possibilities in their lives and assisting them to reach their goals will depend on large changes in the organization and delivery of government, royal and community services.

Those involved in theatre for young people can also contribute to these larger aims of increasing the sense of reality and the realm of possibilities for young people. Success depends on their capacity to imagine, create and transmit the performing arts in Thailand in a new way. This paper suggests seeing them as a tapestry or a garden, but there are undoubtedly other metaphors. The first key point for practitioners, teachers, and students is to make sure that they can come to see and feel the performance traditions in Thailand as part of their lives—something from, by, and for them—and not out there for someone else. And, secondly, these people must come to know that these traditions are practical ways to expand and deepen their capacity to explore their own creative impulses, critical judgment, sense of teamwork and the multiple dimensions projects aiming to affect others' thoughts, feelings and action.

As noted above, the problems in Thailand's existing theatre for young people personnel, materials, and perspectives are substantial. Efforts to improve any of them will have to be incremental and are likely to produce mixed results. Yet by coordinating individual and group efforts, and working toward clear and realizable goals, real and perceivable progress will come. Right now in Thailand, changes are occurring on several fronts. University lecturers and members of theatre troupes regularly work with teachers in teachers' workshops and in their education classes at teachers' workshops and in their education classes at teachers' training schools. These lecturers also work in the non-formal education sector. In rural areas, new schools and new programs funded by the royal family, providing training in the classical performance traditions have started up. An association of those interested in theatre for young people recently formed in Bangkok. Also the first graduates from a post-graduate program for theatre for young people have completed their course at Chulalongkorn University. Still, to have their optimise effect within the present centralized and hierarchical government organization of Thailand, these efforts will have to be set within a broader agenda, with at least tacit support from existing bureaus, as well as enjoys visibility in organs of the mass media, such as newspapers, and TV and radio programming, and greater involvement with local artists. As seen in the first quarter century, well-planned, coordinated, and prolonged efforts do pay off in positive, concrete results. Here I have just covered a few of the most innovative project begun within the last few years in Thailand and have suggested other areas with opportunities for development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Today, Thai people in the theatre for youth field are working in various arenas, with very little coordination of their effort and talent, or organized attempts to build on past successes. Neither in there much attempt to come to some consensus about the background, priorities, and goals for their work. People in each arena try to build on the best in earlier work that that they know is best, but rarely attempt to foster links which connect theatre and young people in Thailand on a broader basis. This makes the future for theatre for young people in Thailand uncertain.

The key elements to improving this lush, but chaotic, jungle of efforts depend on more and better planning, organizing, coordinating, and network-building which aims to produce more and better practitioners, resources and perspectives on how Thailand's rich performance traditions relate to the lives of Thai young people. A new millennium will soon be upon us, and it is not too late to prepare for it. Recent events have demonstrated that we in Thailand have taken too seriously the cultural image of us as a humble, passive, and smiling people who respond to difficult times and problems by publicly saying "mai ben rai" ("it doesn't matter") while doing a lot of vicious backbiting in private. This approach does not seem to have worked. Thailand's financial collapse and the morally bankrupt political system that produced it has burst the previous bubbly decade, and people are beginning to wake up to the less rosy world they actually live in. While many of the problems that have manifested themselves in this collapse and bankruptcy are systemic and not the fault of the individual scapegoats that many

now seek, there is enough blame for the present situation for all. But blame does not lead to change, unless we see that both our actions and our non-action matters. Since it does matter, it is up to all of us to do something about it.

How? In the same ways that positive change always comes about, by working together with like-minded people, learning to express ourselves better and taking responsibility for areas of life and concern which the economy and government are currently incapable of handling. Theatre practitioners move in the small world they have made, where they can practice and train for living, working, laughing and crying. We experiment with the world outside and can try making our own new worlds. Our little world is free to focus on the past, present, or future. Young people are our future and they can learn to work and play in the little world of the theatre as a way of preparing them for the bigger world outside. They are our future. Finding new ways to bring theatre and young people together can help us to imagine and build a more responsible and workable world for us all.

This paper has surveyed the past successes, sketched the range of contemporary problems and prospects and suggested new approaches for the future. While the needs are daunting, they are not impossible to achieve. We need better educational resources for young people. We need better training and skills for both teachers and theatre practitioners. We need to include theatre artists living in local communities or regions in school arts programs. We need to make sure that children have more chances to see and learn about the making of local (or even national) performance traditions in

Thailand. We need artists and educators willing to work more closely with media organizations to present the variety and vitality of Thai performance culture. Finally, we need a better understanding of today's garden of Thai performance culture and the ways that it can help young people learn about and shape their present and future lives.