

# THE STORY OF THE LOST THAI CLASSICAL MUSIC ENSEMBLE: THE WANG BANG KHOLAEM ENSEMBLE

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## Abstract

*This article was written to answer the following two questions, which are 1) What is the history of the Wang Bang Kholaem ensemble? What were the reasons for its establishment and dissolution? 2) What were the factors that led to its success? Did the relationship between the ensemble owner and his musicians contribute to its success? The results were: 1) The Wang Bang Kholaem Thai Classical ensemble was set up around 2470-2475 B.E. The owner was Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames. The ensemble was dissolved after his death. The reason why he chose Bang Kholaem as the location for his ensemble, was that, in the past, Bang Kholaem had been an area of peaceful and shady fruit yards faraway from the capital city, suited for building a retreat for practicing Thai classical music. 2) The factors contributing to the band's success and fame included the fact that the ensemble's owner was royal and was really fond of Thai classical music. He had enough assets to be a patron to a large number of talented musicians and was able to assemble many great teachers to train his musicians. The fact is that the musicians of the Wang Bang Kholaem ensemble*

*inherited musical wisdom from the Wang Burabha ensemble, which belonged to Prince Bhanubhandhu-wongworadech, his father-in-law. Among the great teachers were: Luang Praditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng), Phra Phinbanlengraj (Yam Prasansup) and Phra Phatbanlengromya (Phim Wathin). Moreover, he was also able to gather many gifted musicians into the ensemble. In addition, the ensemble flourished and fostered great interest in the social and cultural environment of the period which existed during the reign of King Rama VII before the Revolution in 2475 B.E. 3) As for the relationship between the great teachers and the musicians, it was based on very strict discipline. In addition to the fact that the owner was of high royalty, the relationship between the owner and his musicians was that of the patronage system according to feudal tradition. The musicians respected and adored the owner so they dedicated themselves to working effortlessly to build a great reputation for the ensemble.*

## 1. Introduction

The objectives of this article are to describe the Wang Bang Kholaem Thai classical music ensemble—one of the most famous Thai classical music ensembles. Although this group lasted for only five years, between approximately 2470-2475 B.E., it was able to establish a name and produced many talented Thai classical musicians for the country. It is obvious that not so many people knew about this ensemble. Most of them recognized the musical works only from word of mouth. Even in the place where the ensemble settled it was not known. This article is an attempt to provide an answer about the history of the ensemble; the relationships among various groups of people in the ensemble; the factors that led to its

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success; and the training process of being musicians.

The Wang Bang Kholaem Thai classical music ensemble was famous as a *piphat* ensemble (a kind of ensemble in the classical music of Thailand, which features wind and percussion instruments). During the period of the reign of King Rama VII, before the Revolution in 2475 B.E., members of Thai royalty owned Thai classical music ensembles and were the patrons of artists and musicians. There were three Thai classical music ensembles that competed with one other in various contests namely, the Wang Luang (King Palace) Ensemble owned by King Rama VII, the Wang Bang Khunphrom Ensemble, own by His Royal Highness Prince Nakornsawan Woraphinit and the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble.



Figure 1 Wang Bang Kholaem, photographed in 2512 B.E., before its demolition. (The picture is from the Crown Property Bureau, donated by Ms. Wiwan Wongsethongsi, the daughter of Wang Chao Dock's owner)

The reason why high class people in Thai society preferred to own *piphat* ensembles was to engage with each other in the competition in order to show their status. This practice started in the reign of King Rama V. Therefore, the patron had to

have knowledge and understanding of the *piphat* musical sound. He also had to be able to adjust the musical sound to the fast or slow movement of the rhythm (Phuchadaphirom 1996:83). To own a *piphat* ensemble for social activities, the owner had to be wealthy and dedicated in order to be a patron to the musicians. This was because the *piphat* contests were in need of devoted skillful and talented musicians who were well-trained. The owners, therefore, had to dedicate themselves to a set of activities ranging from the searching for skillful musicians to be in the ensembles to supporting them to be able to perform in the contests. As the *piphat* ensemble specialized in contests, it was limited to the high-class. The ensemble that won in the contest always earned great prestige for its owner (Phuchadaphirom 1996:84-85).



Figure 2 Wang Bang Kholaem, photographed in 2512 B.E., before its demolition. (The picture from The Crown Property Bureau, donated by Mrs. Wiwan Wongsethongsi, the daughter of Wang Chao Dock's owner)

## **2. The owner of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble**

Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames, the royal forefather of the royal family “Yugala”, was the 41<sup>st</sup> son of King Rama V and Phra Wimada thoe Krommaphra Sudhasineenath Piyamaaraj Padivaratda, King Rama V’s fourth Queen Consort (Momchao Sai, the daughter of Prince Krommamuen Bhumindra-phakdee). He was born on Saturday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2425 B.E and was King Rama V’s favorite son from his birth. King Rama V presented his son a large amount of property for his living so he became known as one of the richest princes (Silaparatsamee 1993:1-8).

According to Thani Silaparatsamee, who has studied his biography, it was mentioned in King Rama V’s writing that:

“My son, Yugala Dighambara, whose mother was Momchao Sai, the daughter of Krommamuen Bhumindra-phakdee, was the son I had longed for and loved very much. As I perceived that his relatives from the maternal side had no power whatsoever to support him, I realized that if he received a large plot of land, he would not have had the power to protect it. If he received a plot of land that was connected with the foreigners, I would not be able find any person to resolve any problems that could happen. I, therefore, agreed to give him something that would be fruitful in the future and assigned H.H.Prince Sai-snidwongse and Luang Navakenikorn to renovate the old derelict building situated in this plot of land. Whatever interest occurred, it should be given as propriety rights to my son, Yugala Dighambara and his offspring.

If my son, Prince Yugala Dighambara, wished to lease or sell his plot of land, the total amount of money received should belong to him and his offspring. It should not be returned to the Royal Treasury or shared with other relatives. If any powerful person or the king needed to possess this plot of land, that person should not only give him the market price, but should also make sure that Prince Yugala Dighambara himself was willing to sell it and not force the sale using the standard price. However, I beg one request in this matter; in the case where my son, Prince Yugala Dighambara ceases to exist, or is not fit to be the owner of this plot of land, I wish to have the right to represent him, unless I have ceased to exist and am not be able to exercise this right. This plot of land shall be given to the person my son, Prince Yugala Dighambara has approved and so nobody—whosoever—will be able reject his intention” (Silaparatsamee 1993:9-10).

**Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames—his career in government office**

- Between 2456 - 2468 B.E. - In the reign of King Rama VI, he worked in the south.
- 2469 - 2470 B.E. - In the reign of King Rama VII, he was Minister of Interior Affairs. Later King Rama VII granted permission for him to take a leave of absence in Europe due to his illness.
- 2473 B.E. - He was a Royal Privy Counselor of King Rama VII until 2475 B.E.
- April 8, 2475 B.E. -He died

(Silaparatsamee 1993: 9-10)



Figure 3 Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames, the owner of Wang Ladawan and Wang Bang Kholaem. The picture from Anandh Nakkhong and Assadawuth Sakrik, *Luangpraditphairoh (Son Silapa-banleng): The Great Musician of the Chao Phraya River, Southeast Asia*, p.104.

Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames married Princess Chalermkhetramangala, daughter of Prince Bhanubhandhu-wongworadech, the forefather of the Royal family “Bhanubhandh”. Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames favored and supported Thai classical music. He owned the Thai classical music ensemble at Ladawan Palace. When he was appointed as Viceroy to the southern provinces, he brought his own musical ensemble to be stationed at Nakornsridhammaraj Province to introduce Thai classical music to the southern region. When he built his new residence “Wang Bang Kholaem (Bang Kholaem Palace)”, he transferred many well-known musicians to his ensemble. Most of these musicians were from Wang Burabha (Burabha Palace) and were his father-in-law’s musicians. Among them, the most famous musician was Luang Praditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng).

The fact is that the musicians of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble inherited the musical wisdom from the Wang Burabha Ensemble, which belonged to Prince Bhanubhandhu-wongworadech, the forefather of the Royal family “Bhanubhandh”. He was the highest royal member of the Chakri Dynasty, a full-blood younger brother of King Rama V and uncle to King Rama VI and VII. In the reign of King Rama VI, he was appointed an army general, a navy admiral, royal-aide-de-camp, and an army and navy inspector. In the reign of King Rama VII he was one of the Royal Privy Counselors. In 2468 B.E., he was promoted to Somdech Phrarachapitula-barom-bongsabhimukh. He died on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2471 B.E. (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:25)



Figure 4 Somdech Chaofa Krommaphraya Bhanubandhu-wongworadech (Prince Wang Burabhabhiromya) (The picture from Anandh Nakkhong and Assadawuth Sakrik, *Luangpraditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng): The Great Musician of the Chao Phraya River, Southeast Asia*,p.24.)

Wang Burabhabhiromya was recognized not only for its grand size and its magnificence but also for its Thai classical music ensemble. (Anek 2006: 59-116) In the past, the palace had been comparable to one of the most famous and prestigious music institutes with a number of talented musicians who offered their services as the ensemble owner’s pages and became the musicians under the great musician, Luang Praditphairoh, These talented musicians were sent to help other palaces’ performances, such as Wang Ladawan (the ‘Red’ Palace) under Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames and Suan Kularb Palace, under Prince Assadang-dechawuth Krommaluang Nakornrachasima. The musicians under the patronage of Prince Wang Burabha included:

Mr. Phad Panjakowit, Mr. On Changsuphan and Mr. See Mee -*krueng nang* - drums players<sup>2</sup>

Mr.Oungkarn (Thong Tor) Kleepchuen -*ranat thum* player

Mr. Ruam Phromburi -*ranat-ek* player

Ms.Chim Lim Kulatan - singer

Mr. Tuam Sadwong -*pi* player

Mr. Sangut Yamakupta -*khong* and *ranat* player

Mr.Prik Hasitasen -*khong* player

Mr. Pued Nakranat and Mr. Phim Nakranat -*ranat-ek* player

Mr.Lap Na Banleng -*ranat-ek* player  
(Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:31)

These musicians were all the students of Luang Praditphairoh, and later inherited skills which allowed them to become famous music teachers.

### **3. The Objectives of Establishing the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble**

Wang Bang Kholaem was established around 2470-2471 B.E. Some people say

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<sup>2</sup> See the definitions of all traditional Thai musical instruments in the Glossary at the end of the paper.

that it was built in the reign of King Rama VI but without any clear evidence to support the hypothesis. Nevertheless, according to referable sources, there were two songs composed by Luang Praditphairoh – the *Phleng Choed Chin of Bang Kholaem* version and the *Phleng Khaek Lopburi of Bang Kholaem* version which were cited as songs that were composed in 2471 B.E. It is, therefore, assumed that this palace might have been built around that year, the year of the death of Prince Wang Burabhabhiromya. According to the book entitled “Luang Praditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng) : The Great Musician from the Chao Phraya River of the Southeast Asia”, written by Anand Nakkong and Assadawuth Sakrik, when the palace’s owner passed away in 2475 B.E., the palace had been established for five years. (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:108-109)

Wang Bang Kholaem was a central region wooden Thai-style house, situated on the Chao Phraya River, on the Bangkok side, in Bang Kholaem sub-district or Ban Thawai of the past. Formerly, this plot of land belonged to Luang Klangklaeokla (Sri Boonsiri), who was a subject of Siam. He lived in Thang Kwien sub-district, Rayong Province. He had sold a plot of land with an area of one *rai* and one *ngan* to Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames in October, 2473 B.E. Later the area was expanded to more than ten *rai*, and involved four title deeds. It was believed that after the first land purchase, there might be some more buying later. (from The Crown Property Bureau)



Figure 5 The Cabinet, Stool and decorative design—property of Wang Bang Kholaem, donated to Wat Channok after the palace was closed down.

The reason for constructing Wang Bang Kholaem was that Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames wanted to have a residence where he could relax and enjoy listening to the *piphat* ensemble. In those days this area was far away from the city center. The palace was therefore, a simple wooden Thai-style house. People who had seen the palace recalled that it was a thatched house. The objective of building this palace was to have a small villa and a place for practicing Thai classical musical instruments. He once said that the reason he stayed at Wang Bang Kholaem was his love for the *piphat* ensemble, whereas Ladawan Palace or the ‘Red’ Palace at Thewes, was the residence of Princess Chalermkhetramanagala, his wife. (Nakkhong and Sakrik2004:103)

At Wang Bang Kholaem, he was patron to many talented musicians who were the palace musicians. Some of them, such as Mr. Phuead Nakranat, Mr. On Changsuphan, Mr. Thongtor Kleep-chuen

and Mr. Lamom Phum-sanoh were from Wang Burabha. In particular, Mr. Phuead Nakranat from Amphawa, Samuthsongkham Province who had studied music under Luang Praditphairoh was praised as one of the leading Thai *ranat* players of the period. This led to the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble being well-recognized among royalty and high-ranking officers from other palaces. In addition, other Wang Bang Kholaem musicians were acquired by Prince Krommuluang Lopburirames himself from Ayudhaya Province to be the palace musicians. These were junior musicians, such as Mr. Phaithun Channat, Mr. Thawin Atthakrit, Mr. Sawong Kerdphon, Mr. Phuan Bunchamroen, and Mr. Prung Rakdontri from Khru Petch Channat’s ensemble, the former *ranat* and *khong wong* player of Wang Burabha. He assigned Changwang (Lord Great Chamberlain) Phad Panchakowit to be supervisor in charge of these senior and junior musicians. (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:103)

Ms. Bang-on and Ms. Apsorn Bhusuwan, daughters of Mr. Singto Bhusuwan, the boat-man of Wang Bang Kholaem, the two women who still live near Wang Bang Kholaem, say that there were many big trees in the palace which made the place shady, cool and pleasant. There were Asoke trees with orange colored flowers, rose apple trees, ebony trees, and an orange jasmine arch. The area of the palace consisted of vegetable and fruit-tree plots and its environment seemed like a shady garden. (Ms. Bang-on and Ms. Apsorn Phusuwan. Interview on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007)



Figure 6 Ms. Bang-on Phusuwan (left) and Ms. Apsorn Phusuwan (right), daughters of Mr. Singto Phusuwan the boat man ‘Manorah’ of Wang Bang Kholaem



Figure 7 Ms. Prarom Misiri (left) and Ms. Pranee Siphong (right)—have lived in the area of Wang Bang Kholaem since 2508 B.E. Ms. Prarom Misiri’s husband was Lt.Col Chalong Charuwat, the Wang Bang Kholaem keeper before its demolition in 2512 B.E.

The palace’s residential section consisted of a throne hall at the center and a chamber for *ranat* playing at the side. On the opposite side were a restroom, a bedroom, and another small room. Apart from the chambers at the center, there were a number of small houses. It is believed that these small houses were the dwelling places of palace servants. At the edge of the Chao Phraya River, there was a pontoon and a motor boat named “Manorah”, the palace owner’s boat. At ground level under the houses, there were three or four wooden boats. Mr. Singto Bhusuwan—the Maorah’s boatman—was born in 2454 B.E. He had lived at this palace since his childhood. After the palace was closed down in 2475 B.E. following the death of the palace owner, Mr. Singto and his family continued to live nearby. He recounts that in 2495 B.E., the palace was sold, some of Changwangs moved most of the palace’s treasures out of the palace and some of the treasures were given to Wat Channok, a

temple near the palace. (Ms. Bang-on and Ms. Apon Phusuwan. Interview on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007)



Figure 8 A drawing recreated from the memory of Ms. Bang-on and Ms. Apon Phusuwan. Personal Interview.

Wang Bang Kholaem was demolished in 2512 B.E. At present, the palace area has been replaced by Wang Chao Dock, located at Soi Chareonkrung 109, 10-1 branch. Before its demolition, the palace owner—Prince Bhanubhadhn-yugala (Ong Chai Yai)—the eldest son of Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames—assigned Lt.Col.Chalong Charuwat as palace caretaker and Lt.Col.Chalong who lived near the palace, informed Ong Chai Yai that he had seen some thieves and some wanderers residing near the palace. Prince Bhanubhandh-yugala paid Lt.Col.Chalong 400 baht monthly to hire someone to guard the palace. Lt.Col.Chalong served as palace caretaker for about three to four years. After that the Bureau of the Crown Property took over responsibility and Dr. Songphan Wongthongsri, M.D. won the bid to rent the area that used to be Wang Bang Kholaem and, later, built Wang Chao Dock on the plot of land. (Ms. Prarom Misiri, Personal Interview, 2550 B.E., 22 April.)

Mrs. Prarom Misiri, wife of Lt.Col.Chalong Charuwat, recalled that they moved into a house close to the palace in 2508 B.E. Lt.Col.Chalong was acquainted with a relative of Prince Bhanubhandh-yugala, who therefore asked Lt.Col.Chalong to meet him at the palace in order to hire a person to guard the palace. At that time, there was no precious treasure left. Even the planks of wood were stolen. (Ms. Prarom Misiri, Personal Interview, 2550 B.E., 22 April.)



Figure 9 The area of Wang Bang Kholaem at the time of Pre-construction Phase of Wang Chao Dock. The picture was given by Ms. Wiwan Wongsethongsri, the daughter of Wang Chao Dock's owner.

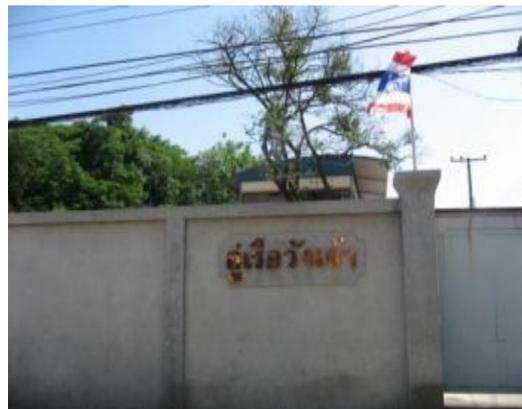


Figure 10 Wang Chao Dock—located on Charoenkrung 109 Road, Yaek 10-1

#### **4. The Three Groups of Musicians and the Environment at Wang Bang Kholaem**

Although the Wang Bang Kholaem ensemble existed for only a short period of time, its reputation was widespread because the ensemble gathered many talented musicians, teachers, trainers, and students from various places.

The three great teachers who helped train the musicians were:

1. Phra Phinbanlengraj (Yam Prasarnsup) – who taught singing and *klong khaek*
2. Phra Phatbanlengromya (Phim Wathin) – who taught how to play *klong songna*
3. Luang Praditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng) – who taught how to play various musical instruments



Figure 11 Luang Praditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng) (Picture from Anandh Nakkhong and Assadawuth Sakrik, *Luangpraditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng): The Great Musician of the Chao Phraya River, Southeast Asia*, the book cover.)

The conductor of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble was Changwang Phad Panyakowit. As far as teaching and learning were concerned, teachers were responsible for discipline and timing, especially, Luang Pradit Phairoh who had classes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. His students were divided into three groups: seniors, juniors and minors. Senior musicians were:

Mr. Phuead Nakranat - a *ranat* player

Mr. Lamom Phumsanoh - a *khong wong yai* player

Mr. Thongtor Kleepchue - a *ranat thum* and *khong wong lek* player (or Flt.Lt.Ongkarn Kleepchuen)

Mr. Ruam Phromburi - a *khong wong lek* player

Mr. Mak Sukkalapasut - no evidence

Mr.Sri Sukkalapasut - no evidence

Junior musicians were:

Mr.Ruam Phromburi - a *ranat ek* player

Mr. Fung Hanthong - a *khong wong yai* player

Mr.Sawong Saengruangrong - a *ranat thum* player

Mr.Sophon Suetochart - a *khong wong lek* player

Mr. On Changsuphan - a *pi* player

Minor musicians were:

Mr. Phaithun Channat - a *ranat ek* player

Mr.Thawin Atthakrit - a *khong wong yai* player

Mr.Prung Rakdontri - a *ranat thum* player

Mr. Sophon Suetochart- a *khong wong lek* player

Mr.On Changsuphan - a *pi* player

(Udomsri 2006:21)



Figure 12 Mr. Ruam Phromburi



Figure 13 Mr. Ongkan Kleepchuen



Figure 14 Mr. Phuead Nakranat

### Wang Bang Kholaem musicians

It is obvious that the musicians of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble were from various places. As for Mr. Ruam Phromburi, he was brought to the palace by Luang Charn-choengranat (Ngoen Phalarak). In addition, Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames himself travelled to many provinces in search of talented musicians. Once he went to Bangpa-in palace, Ayudhaya Province and asked Changwang Phad Panchakowit, the ensemble conductor, to look for the skillful *piphat* players and singers. He also invited them to compete with his ensemble. At that time no one dared to compete with his ensemble, except for Khru Petch Channat, a former musician of Wang Burabhabhirom. Khru Petch arranged the *piphat* ensemble of minor musicians such as Nai Thawin Atthakrit to play with the ensemble. (Not to enter into a competition with the palace ensemble) (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128).

The senior musicians of Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble who played in Ayudhaya were:

Mr. On Changsuphan - a *pi* player

Mr. Phuead Nakranat - a *ranat ek* player

Mr. Lamom Phumsanoh - a *khong wong yai* player

Mr. Sawong Sangruangrong - a *ranat thum* player

Mr. Ongkarn Kleepchuen - a *khong wong lek* player

Mr. Chala Ritmak - a *klong songna* player

Luang Siang Sanohkan (Phan Muktapai) - a singer

Khunying Ramrachabundit Sithiseranee (Yiam Suwong) - a singer

Ms. Chimlim Kulatan - a singer

(Duanchanthip 1985:111-128)

When the two ensembles finished their performance, Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames was so impressed by the performance of Khru Petch that he asked Khru Petch's permission to bring five of his musicians to Wang Bang Kholaem. These five musicians were:

Mr. Phaithun Channat - a *ranat ek* player

Mr. Thawin Atthakrit - a *khong wong yai* player

Mr. Prung Rakdontri - a *ranat thum* player

Mr. Phuan Bunchamroe - a *pi* player

Mr. Sawong Kerdphon - a *klong songna* player

(Duanchanthip 1985:111-128)

As for the training sessions at Wang Bang Kholaem, Khru Ruam Phromburi mentions that there were about twenty musicians of his age group at the palace. He enjoyed practicing musical instruments

with these musicians. However, the life of musicians at the palace was strictly controlled because the palace's owner was very strict (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128). Khru Ruam explained the life at Wang Bang Kholaem to Mr. Sathien Duanchanthip who interviewed Khru Ruam in 2528 B.E. as follows:

...Living in the palace was so good. Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames was very kind but he did not allow us to wander around outside the palace. In the evening, he wanted us to practice playing musical instruments until nine p.m.—the time when the Bang Kholaem—Sanyaek tram ended its service for the day—when he allowed us to finish playing. He was afraid that we would sneak out of the palace. He would not allow us to do so for fear that we would get venereal disease....

(Duanchanthip 1985:111-128)

Even though Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames was strict about wandering around outside the palace, some young musicians were able to sneak out. These musicians were punished and confined in the Tamnak (the royal residence). The Prince assigned each of these confined musicians royal attendants, or his royal pages (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128).

...While the well-behaved ones could live peacefully, the irresponsible ones were summoned to serve him at his royal residence. I was one of the royal pages. Ai Chang and Ai Phuead were posted as the royal attendants at the Prince's bedroom, so he could keep an eye on them. Ai Phuead was a night owl. Many times, he was put

in fetters. I was also called to serve him at his royal residence but I did not receive severe punishment. He called us the three rats. He said if our group, Lamom, Thongtor, and I were enlisted, he would dissolve his band. Fortunately, all of us were exempted...

(Duanchanthip 1985:111-128)

As for the musical practice session at Wang Bang Kholaem, musicians had to practice hard in the morning and in the evening. At night, the musicians had to practice playing with ivory instruments in Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames's presence at the grand sala, with Ms.Chimlim Kulatan and Mr.Phin Muangchan as singers. Khru Ruam said that Krommaluang Lopburirames preferred *piphat-maikhaeng* to *krueang sai* while H.H.Princess Chalermkhetra preferred *krueang sai* (A Thai string ensemble) (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128).

Musical study at Wang Bang Kholaem was done under the three great teachers—Luangpraditphairoh (Son Silapabanleng), Phra Phinbanlengraj (Yam Prasansap) and Phra Phatbanlengromya (Phim Wathin) from Krommahorasop (the Department of Entertainment). Those who needed to practice one by one at Luang Praditphairoh's house outside the palace had to contribute fifty satang for the transportation fare. On weekdays, Phra Phatbanlengromya came to teach the playing of *klong songna* and Phra Phinbanlengraj taught singing and playing *klong khaek*. The teaching of singing was under the guidance of Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames who invited other teachers to teach, especially special songs. Apart from that, the musicians had to practice with Luang Praditphairoh at his house. In addition, if the Prince knew the

great teachers had particular skills he would send his musicians to learn from them (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128).

As for person-to-person tutoring outside the palace, Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames set strict rules to prevent any sneaking out of the palace for pleasure. He made seven colored cards according to the color assigned for each day and gave these colored cards to those who had permission to go out depending on the day. On the card, the time of departure was recorded. Upon arrival, the card holder needed to have the time of departure at the teacher's house with the teacher's signature, together with the name of the song studied and whether the song studied had been completed or not. Although he set such strict rules for the musicians who went out of the palace for tutoring, some of these musicians still broke them, as Khru Ruam mentions:

...We were crowded at Khru Luang Praditphairoh. When we were ready, he asked us that at what time we wanted to leave, so we said softly "quite late, around 3 p.m." He then wrote on the cards that these musicians had left his house at 3 p.m. We had to bring this card back to the palace to prove that we had come and practiced or else we could not cash the money. Khru Luang Praditphairoh was very generous. When we left his house, we went to play billiards at Tiang Huad, opposite Sala Chalerm Krung Theater. ....We came back to the palace at just the exact time specified in the card (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128).

It was obvious that the musicians of Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble were all skillful

because they followed strict rules and practiced regularly. Among these musicians, Mr. Phuead was a capable *ranat ek* player and another capable junior musician was Khru Ruam Phromburi. Many great teachers of that period complained that the way Mr. Phuead played *ranat* was like eating curry that tasted only hot and spicy, but listening to the way Khru Ruam played *ranat* was as sweet as eating honey that had a complete taste. Muen Prakomphleng Prasarn and Khru Montri Tramote once said that the *ranat*-playing style of Khru Ruam was like “*Ranat Ngop Nam Oi*” (the sound of *ranat* like the cake of sugar cane), which could be listened to again and again, and if Mr. Phuead was called the Champion of *ranat mai khaeng* players of Thailand, Khru Ruam should also be named the Champion of *ranat mai nuam* of the Mahori ensemble of Thailand (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128).

The contest of court music between the palace ensembles in Khru Ruam’s Memory was on the Fourth Cycle Birthday Anniversary of Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames in 2473 B.E. Khru Ruam recalls that he arranged a contest between Changwang Thua’s *piphat* ensemble and Luang Praditphairoh’s ensemble. These two ensembles started playing at dusk until dawn the following day. The contest was judged by the great teachers, Khru Phum, Khru Klam Na Bangchang and Khru Chareon. During the performance, the prince observed and listened very attentively. If his musicians did not perform well, he said, satirically, that the musicians were rice-wasters who were not producing anything useful in return (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128). Khru Ruam mentions further that he lived happily at the palace for many years until he had grown up and attained both music

skills and experience in life. (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128)

When Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames passed away in 2475 B.E., the musicians of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble realized that it was about time to move on, and they returned to their houses for good since it was not as comfortable to remain in the palace as it had been before. It was as if the prince had forecast ahead of time and had already prepared for the future of his musicians. Khru Ruam mentions that the prince gave the parting instruction before he died that no one had the right to expel his musicians, and it was entirely their own decision to move out. He also wrote a confidential document to Chaophraya Sripiphat and Chaophraya Woraphongse, saying that he wanted to put twelve of his musicians in the care of the Department of Fine Arts. Khru Ruam was put in the care of Princess Chalermkhetr, his wife at Wang Ladawan. Of these musicians, some became navy officers, while others went to the Department of Fine Arts (Duanchanthip 1985:111-128).

In the same way, Mr. Phaithun Channat, the son of Khru Petch Channat, recalls that when he was at Wang Bang Kholaem, he was forced to practice all day, and that by practising hard, he became skillful and could recognize the songs very well (Duanchanthip 1992:42). The musicians of Wang Bang Kholaem were skillful and well-recognized. The regular competition enabled these musicians to be alert and always prepared. This later allowed them to enter the contests with other royal ensembles. It was obvious that the ensembles with talented and skillful musicians would bring the owners fame and prestige.

The Wang Bang Kholaem musicians mentioned above had their own rooms with their personal musical instruments in these rooms. There was also a cook to take care of their food and also maids to do the cleaning. Their routine activity was to get up at four in the morning and practice with their own musical instruments until eight o'clock. Then Luang Praditphairoh came to give lessons and made adjustments when playing together as an ensemble. At night, these musicians had to practice sets of songs for performance or for the contests. There were daily schedules for sets of songs rotating all through the week, such as on Mondays, practicing *Pleng Sepha*, on Tuesdays, practicing *Pleng Rueang*, and so on (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:106-107).

Generally, Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames did not allow his musicians to become involved with others. But Mr. Yen Ong-iam, Khru Maitri's brother-in-law often secretly persuaded Mr. Phud and Mr. Lamom to perform outside the palace. However, when there was a performance at the palace or another important assignment, these musicians never disappointed the ensemble owner (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004 :107).

The most impressive moment observed by Khru Maitri was in 2473 B.E., when Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames had celebrated his Fourth cycle birthday anniversary at Wang Daeng (the 'Red' palace) or Ladawan Palace. At that time, King Rama VII and Prince Krommaphra Nakornsawan Woraphinit attended the celebration. There were three *piphat* ensembles in the contest: the Wang Luang (King Palace) Ensemble, the Wang Bang-khunphrom Ensemble and the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble. The party was a big event. Big tents were set up in the center court. The Wang Luang Ensemble was

placed in the center in front of King Rama VII's presence with Luang Praditphairoh as the conductor. Mr. Thiap Khonglaithong played *pi*, Mr. Chuen Duriyapranit played *ranat* and Mr. Yanyong Prongnamchai played *klong song na*. Next, on the left was the Wang Bang Khunphrom band. Khru Changwang Thua was the band conductor, Mr. Thewaprasith Phatthayakoson played *pi nai*, Mr. Chian Malaiman played *ranat ek*, Mr. Chor Sunthornwathin played *khong wong yai*, and Mr. Maew Phatthayakoson played *klong songna*. Finally, on the right hand side of the tent was the Wang Bang-kholaem Ensemble. Luang Praditphairoh was also the band conductor. The musicians were Mr. Phud Nakranat who played *ranat ek*, Mr. Lamom Phumsanoh who played *khong wong yai*, Mr. Phaithun Channat who played *khong wong lek*, Mr. Sawang who played *ranat thum*, and Mr. Chala who played *klong songna* (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004 :108).

Khru Maitri mentions that the songs used in the contest that he still remembers were: *Homrong Khluen-krathopfang*; *Ratripradapdao* and *Khmer La-or-ong* which were composed by King Rama VII. It is said that this was the first time that these three compositions of King Rama VII were performed in the contest. The Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble was assigned to play *Homrong Khluen-krathopfang*. The contest started at dusk and continued until dawn. Khru Maitri says that, at that time, Mr. Lamom, who was only eighteen years old, had to play solo *khong wong yai* in front of King Rama VII. It was his first contest and he survived the contest with flying colors (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:108).

Khru Bunyong Ketkhong is the National Artist, who is renowned as "*ranat of the pearl rolling on the jade plate*". In his interview with Mr. Sathien

Duangchanthip, he describes Mr. Phuad Nakranat's skill. The first time that Khru Bunyong Ketkhong became a student of Luang Praditphairoh, he met Mr. Phuad Nakranat. He was stunned to hear the vigorous *ranat* sound and found out that his *ranat* playing style was beautiful and melodious. Khru Bunyong went on to mention about Mr. Phuad's skills looking incredible and that he could play *ranat* so very well. His personal technique at the beginning of *Pleng Sathukan* was very impressive (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:52-53).

As for the skill and talent of Khru Ruam Phromburi, Khru Bunyong said that Khru Ruam's skill at playing *ranat* was so sweet and complete (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:72).

In the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble, there were not only permanent musicians but also some talented musicians who helped perform on some occasions. These musicians were all Luang Praditphairoh's students. Mr. Chuen Duriyapranit, the *ranat ek* player of the Duriyapranit ensemble also played in the Wang Bang Kholaem *Piphat* Ensemble in the contest at Wang Bang Kholaem in 2473 B.E (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:25).

The outstanding feature of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble was its pioneering of the changing versions of various songs, such as *Choed Chin of Bang Kholaem* version (2471 B.E.). These versions were joyous and melodious (Udomsri 2006:22). In addition, these two songs have been the trademark of the Wang Bang Kholaem *Piphat* Ensemble until now. They were known to Thai classical music society as the amazing *Phleng Sepha* (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:104).

These two songs originated from *Phleng Sepha*. They are joyous and inspiring and use teasing and intervening techniques. The musicians and the singers have to show their talent. The former was composed by Khru Phra Praditphairoh (Khru Mi Khaek). The song is believed to be one of his masterpieces humbly presented to King Pinklaochaoyuhu. The latter was composed by Khru Choi Sunthorawathin, one of the major musicians in the reign of King Rama V. The song demonstrates beautiful melody to match the lyrics. Both *phleng Choedchin* and *Phleng Khaek Lopburi* have also been recognized as impressive Thai classical songs. Luang Praditphairoh chose to introduce innovation in composing these two songs (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:105).

To be able to perform these two songs well, the musicians had to have good basics, be well-trained, be physically and mentally strong, and ultimately skillful. These two songs exhibit several features: firstly the readiness and the strength of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble, then the talented and skillful musicians who practiced very hard, and, finally, the numbers of teachers who excelled in both composing and adjusting the instruments so as to be able to play as a band. Lastly but not least in significance was the royal patron who dedicated his time and money to support a Thai classical music band (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004:105).

The Wang Bang Kholaem band lasted for about five years. Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames passed away on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2475 B.E.—not long before the Revolution in 2475 B.E. The musicians under his patronage moved out of the palace and returned to their music institute taking with them the knowledge and songs learned from Luang Praditphairoh to

perform outside the palace (Nakkhong and Sakrik 2004 :108-109).

## 5. Conclusion

The Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble was a symbol of the last golden age of Thai classical music before entering the period of decline after the Revolution of 2475 B.E. To create such a capable and well-recognized band required lots of resources. First of all was the real prestige and powerful royalty who could establish and possess this well-known band. The ensemble under the patronage of high-class people could survive only under a feudal and absolute monarchy system. After the Revolution of 2475 B.E. the members of royalty, who were the ensemble patrons, did not have as much property to support the ensembles as in the past. Some highly-placed royals such as Prince Nakorn Sawanworaphinit—the Pillar of Thai classical music—had to seek asylum abroad. The money the royal court and the royal persons formerly received was cut for this reason and the royal court and the royal persons' palace could no longer provide dwelling places and patronage for many talented musicians. As a result, what happened later was the closure of these palaces. Those who were under the patronage of royalty had to be dispersed and started to make their own living performing music for money at various events or setting up theatrical troupes. This was the end of the gifted and skillful Thai classical music ensembles of the Absolute Monarchy period.

Factors accounting for the success of the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble were:

**1) The ensemble owner.** He had status and sufficient assets to be patron to talented musicians who could live happily

doing nothing except for practicing playing musical instruments and training to produce their best. In addition, he was a person who had a passion for and was knowledgeable about Thai classical music. This period, when the band was established, was a time when Thailand was faced with significant economic decline (2472-2475 B.E.). The Thai government had to cut government expenses, and had to cut wages and salaries including those of government officers, many of whom were also laid off. The palaces and the royal persons' residences were also affected. The Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble, on the other hand, continued because the palace owner had sufficient property to support these musicians.

**2) The teachers or Khru.** There were many great and talented teachers to give lessons and train these musicians, including Luang Praditphairoh, Phra Phinbanlengraj (Yam Prasansup) and Phra Phatbanlengromaya (Phim Wathin). These teachers devoted themselves physically and intellectually to the royals, who were the palace owners, in order to establish Thai classical music ensembles as jewels of the palaces, and by doing so creating skillful palace ensembles who could win competitions and boost their prestige among royalties. Luang Praditphairoh himself composed two songs for the Wang Bang Kholaem Ensemble—*Phleng Choedchin of Wang Bang-kholaem version* and the *Phleng Khaek Lopburi of Wang Bang Kholaem version*. Luang Praditphairoh rearranged and made some adjustments to the old versions to make them suitable for competition.

**3) Enthusiastic musicians wishing to be the best.** In the past, to become a well-known musician, one had to be under the patronage of a wealthy royal person. A

number of talented musicians offered themselves for the patronage of Prince Krommaluang Lopburirames, the owner of Bang Kholaem palace, and they included Mr. Phuaed Nakranat, Mr. Ruam Phromburi, and Mr. Thongtor (Ongkan) Kleepchuen. They were talented and skillful professional musicians. In order to achieve that goal, they needed to be chosen and put under the care of great music teachers. Also, the palace owner chose these musicians themselves. A number of the Wang Bang Kholaem musicians were well-trained and when they resided in the palace, they followed the palace's strict rules and practiced very hard both to reward the palace owner's kindness and to fulfill their hopes of becoming great musicians.

**4) The social environment** helped promote the glory of Thai classical music. It could be pointed out that Thai classical music prospered under the absolute monarchy system. Under this system, royal persons and high-ranking government officers had the privilege to own property and to receive more benefits. These groups of people had capabilities and possessed the status of masters and used the patronage system to take care of their servants and entourage. At the same time, the people under patronage repaid their masters with good services to confound the Thai saying, “*Liang Sia Khao Suk*” and, “*Khao mai mi yang*”, which means “fed them but received little in return.” The royals displayed their status by possessing the great Thai classical music ensembles for competition. The revolution of 2475 B.E. resulted in a change of power structure in Thai society. The power and prestige of royalty end. The new environment of society, politics and culture of the Post-revolution period did not support the existence of the old system. Thai classical

music ensembles had finally met a crisis as had their owners.

## Acknowledgement

The Footnote Thai-English refer from the Royal Institute. Thai Romanization Principle. [www.royin.go.th/upload/246/File Upload/416\\_2157.pdf](http://www.royin.go.th/upload/246/File Upload/416_2157.pdf).

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#### Personal Interview

Ms. Apson Phusuwan, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007.  
Ms. Bang-on Phusuwan, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007  
Ms. Pranee Siphong, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007  
Ms. Prarom Misiri, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007

## Glossary

Definitions of the terms for traditional  
Thai music instruments were taken from  
Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia on  
August 30, 2012.

*Piphat* (ปี่พาทย์) is the most common and  
iconic Thai classical music that  
symbolizes the dancing of the Thailand's  
legendary dragons, it involves a mid-sized  
orchestra including two xylophones  
(*ranat*), an oboe (*pi*), barrel drums (*klong*)  
and two circular sets of tuned horizontal  
gong-chimes (*khong wong lek* and *khong  
wong yai*).

*Khrueang Sai* (เครื่องสาย) is an orchestra  
combining some percussion and wind  
instruments of the *piphat* with an  
expanded string section including the *saw  
duang* (a high-pitched two-string bowed  
lute), the lower pitched *saw u* (bowed lute)  
and the three-string *jakhe* (a plucked  
zither). In addition to these instruments are  
the *khlui* (vertical fipple flute) in several  
sizes and ranges, a goblet drum (*thon-  
rammana*) and, occasionally, a small  
hammered Chinese dulcimer (*khim*).

*Ranat* (ระนาด) - trough-resonated keyboard  
percussion instrument; generally played  
with two mallets and used in Thai classical  
and theater music.

*Ranat ek* (ระนาดเอก) - higher xylophone, with  
bars usually made of hardwood

The *ranat ek* has 22 wooden bars  
suspended by cords over a boat-shaped  
trough resonator, and is played with two  
mallets. It is used as a leading instrument  
in the *piphat* ensemble. The *ranat ek* is  
played by two types of mallets. The hard  
mallets (*mai khaeng* -ไม้แข็ง) create a sharp  
bright sound when the keys are hit. The  
hard mallets are used for faster playing.  
The soft mallets (*mai nuam* -ไม้นวม) create a  
mellow and softer tone which is used for  
slower songs. *Ranat ek* bars are typically  
made from rosewood (ไม้ชิงชัน; *mai ching  
chan*), although in rare instances  
instruments with bamboo bars can be  
found.

*Ranat thum* (ระนาดทุ้ม) - lower xylophone,  
with bamboo or hardwood bars

The *ranat thum* is a low pitched  
xylophone used in the music of Thailand.  
It has 18 wooden keys, which are stretched

over a boat-shaped trough resonator. Its shape looks like a *ranat ek*, but it is lower and wider. It is usually played in accompaniment to a *ranat ek*. *Ranat thum* bars are typically made from bamboo, although instruments with rosewood (ไม้ชิงชัน; *mai ching chan*) bars can also be found.

*Khong wong* (ฆ้องวง) is a circle of gongs. It is played in the middle of the circle.

*Khong wong yai* (ฆ้องวงใหญ่) - lower gong circle; comprises many small tuned bossed gongs mounted in a rattan frame

The *khong wong yai* is a circle with gongs used in the music of Thailand. It has 16 tuned bossed gongs in a rattan frame and is played by two beaters. The player sits in the middle of the circle. It is used in the *piphat* ensemble to provide the skeletal melody for the other instruments of the elaborate ensemble. The gongs are individually tuned with beeswax under the gongs. The *khong wong yai* can either be played with soft beaters or hard beaters.

*Khong wong lek* (ฆ้องวงเล็ก) - higher gong circle; consists of many small tuned bossed gongs mounted in a rattan frame

The *khong wong lek* is a gong circle used in Thai classical music. It has 18 tuned bossed gongs, and is smaller and higher in pitch than the *khong wong yai*. Both instruments are played in the same manner but the *khong wong lek* plays a faster and more ornate variation of the principal melody, with less use of two-note chords. Each gong is tuned with beeswax under the gongs.

*Khloi* (ขลุ่ย) - vertical duct flute made of bamboo, hardwood or plastic

*Pi* (ปี่) - quadruple- or double-reed oboe

*Pi nai* (ปี่ใน) - standard leading instrument used in the *piphat* ensemble

*Klong khaek* (กลองแขก) - barrel drum; played with the hands and generally played in pairs

*Klong khaek* is a type of double-headed barrel drum used in Thai music. The instrument's name comes from *klong* (meaning "drum") and *khaek* (meaning "Indian" or "Malay").

*Klong song na* is a Thai barrel drum. *Song na* means "two faces," and the drum has two heads that are played with the hands. It is used primarily in the *piphat* ensemble.