

A Case for Rote Learning: Conserving the *Ramwong* Saxophone Culture of Suntaraporn

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Published: 31 May 2021

Cite this article (APA): Phokha, P. (2021). A case for rote learning: Conserving the *ramwong* saxophone culture of Suntaraporn, *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 10 (1), 91-106.
<https://doi.org/10.37134/mjm.vol10.1.6.2021>

Abstract

The Suntaraporn band is one of the most successful and influential groups in Thai cultural history. They transformed Thai musical culture throughout the twentieth century, typified by their adaptation of *ramwong*, a local genre of music that is difficult to learn. The objectives of this investigation were to discuss the process of developing and educating learners in *ramwong* saxophone in the Suntaraporn style, by giving insights derived from interviews from expert saxophonists and student *ramwong* music practitioners. Data from interviews and evaluation forms from three purposively selected research informants were analysed. Findings showed that learners of saxophone music for *ramwong* songs must be familiar with modern saxophone techniques and possess basic knowledge of musical techniques played in traditional Thai music. Four sets of saxophone practice drills were subsequently developed by the researcher and approved as suitable for instruction of *ramwong* music techniques by the three informants. One practice set was tested by undergraduate musicians. The results and feedback corroborated the beliefs outlined by the three professional saxophonists that rote learning is a necessary component of traditional Thai music teaching.

Keywords: cultural heritage, cultural studies, musical instruction, pedagogy, rote learning, Suntaraporn

Introduction

National governments increasingly realise the importance of cultural conservation at the local, regional and national levels as a means of strengthening national identity and securing popular support. Since 1951, Thailand's membership of UNESCO has led to a progressive attitude towards cultural conservation, which has been driven domestically by the Office of the National Education Commission. It is the job of this organisation to analyse culture, education and science within Thailand, and help overcome problems that prevent further national development. Culturally, the direction of government policy is determined by the National Education Plan, 2017-2036 (Office of the National Education Commission, 2017). This strategy outlines the national objective of using traditional customs and practices to boost and strengthen local society as a bedrock of the nation.

One challenge to cultural conservation is globalisation. Western culture is playing an increasingly prominent role in everyday Thai society, prompting the government to intensify its attitude towards preservation of national culture. Government culture strategies are viewed as a legitimate method of enhancing the Thai collective identity and strengthening traditional culture. In the latter part of the twentieth century, so-called "musical globalisation", in effect the Westernisation of traditional music, prompted a government reaction in Thailand. On one hand, there was increased production and commercialisation of Thai pop music to meet consumer interests and boost the economy, on the other hand, there was greater emphasis on the revival of traditional music genres in educational institutions (Green, 2017; Maryprasith, 1999; Pitumpunak, 2018).

A Thai Identity?

Centralised and focused government policies have resulted in increased interest in traditional music nationwide, which is viewed as an integral element of national heritage (Nicholas, 2019). Traditional Thai music is an embodiment of ancestry, cultural traditions, customs, economy and lifestyle in Thai communities. People's stories are retold through the melodies, dances and lyrics of traditional musical performances. As such, performers and their instruments play a vital role in continuing the memory of the nation. Following social acceptance, music becomes a fixture in national culture. Once embedded, music soon assumes responsibility for systematic transmission of generational knowledge. Thailand is rich in musical heritage, each region can claim a unique musical identity, each recounting new and fascinating stories of Thailand's past.

Occasionally, local attempts to maintain musical culture through conservation go mainstream. *Suntaraporn* is one such example. They are a hybrid jazz group who became famous for adapting classical Thai and Thai folk music. The band has a rich history in adapting and composing musical innovations, songs and techniques that remained true to Thai culture. *Suntaraporn* was formed during World War II, on 20 November 1941. The founder and lead musician was Khru Eua Sunthornsanan, who subsequently became recognised by UNESCO as a world personality on the 2010-11 UNESCO list of World Personalities and Historic Events. *Suntaraporn* became the official band of the newly established Public Relations Department of Thailand and it was their job to compose and perform music for the official Thai Public Relations Department radio station. The band was also entrusted with recordings for special events and live performances. This was an important point in Thai musical history. *Suntaraporn* is not an ordinary band. The band was notable for its membership of multiple, nationally-recognised musical talents who

composed a substantial and diverse repertoire of music in a variety of styles suited for different occasions. Their collection includes classical, folk, jazz, traditional Thai and Western music. The band became extremely popular and they composed over 2,000 songs that were well-received by audiences (Eimtal et al., 2020).

Suntaraporn composed music that can be broadly categorised into ten distinct groups: (a) psalms; (b) music for educational institutions, provincial songs and music for provincial agencies; (c) music for youth; (d) music from literature; (e) songs communicating proverbs and teachings; (e) songs of nature and beauty; (f) music of love and disappointment; (g) music reflecting society; (h) songs that retell drama or other stories; and songs related to traditions, religion and local games (Suwat, 2019). Their music became popular with middle class citizens, and particularly appealed to government officials, teachers and tradesmen. It was also very popular on the Bangkok dance scene, and the band developed songs to accompany traditional dance performances. Suntaraporn is recognised as being the band to have composed the most traditional Thai music in the world, with one of their most significant contributions being the popularisation of the *ramwong* circle dance from rural Thailand (Lichinda, 2014).

Despite their prominence and importance for Thai musical heritage, there is no method or set of exercises developed specifically for learning the *ramwong* style of the Suntaraporn band, which is unique in its use of non-traditional instruments.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to discuss the process of developing and educating learners in *ramwong* saxophone in the Suntaraporn style, by giving insights derived from interviews with expert saxophonists and students practising the *ramwong* form. The research required the development of saxophone practice materials for the *ramwong* songs of Suntaraporn, which were then used by undergraduate saxophonists. Results from this process were analysed to discuss the particular characteristics of learning Thai music, with an emphasis on rote learning.

Literature Review

Suntaraporn and Cultural Heritage in Thailand

Given the additional emphasis placed by the government on maintenance of traditional Thai culture, recent domestic academic studies of musical inheritance have been plentiful. Much of the literature concerns differences between the musical identities of different regions in Thailand (Deecharoen & Chullasap, 2018) and generational obstacles to continued traditional musical inheritance (Putipumnak, 2018). In a seminal English-language paper on the cultural significance of Suntaraporn et al. (2018) claimed, contrary to the government intention of popularising traditional Thai culture, the band was integral to the process of Westernisation in Thailand and responsible for repressing values in rural Thailand. In the analysis, Suntaraporn is considered a “state puppet” who acted contrary to the interests of rural Thai society. They were “used as a tool to reconstruct new values and lifestyle for all commoners” (Photikanit & Sirasoonthorn, 2018, p. 344). Although not explicitly directed at Suntaraporn, this opinion is shared by Maryprasith (1999). Domestic assessments of Suntaraporn tend to steer clear of the political debate and focus on their role as trend-setters, emphasising their lasting impact on Thai society, which is

undeniable. They were able to transform outdated traditional music for new audiences and, apart from criticisms of Suntaraporn as a mechanism of the state, research has also shown some concerns with the content of their songs (Ajharn, 1992), linguistics (Junlaprom, 2008; Phakkhaphanon, 2017; Phakkhaphanon, 2018) and structure (Worawanit, 2016). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of academic literature concerning the composition of Suntaraporn music and their legacy in Thai education, particularly regarding the ubiquitous *ramwong*.

A traditional circle dance performed in pairs, *ramwong* was originally conceived in Thai villages. The style is an evolution of *ramtone* and was traditionally accompanied by local percussion instruments resembling drums, clappers and cymbals, as well as traditional wind instruments such as the *pi*. *Ramwong* was promoted by the Thai government during World War Two as a way to increase inner-city morale and divert public attentions from jazz and swing music. The music grew a large fan-base among middle-class citizens and benefitted from the influence of the Suntaraporn band, who were responsible for its evolution by adding the popular Western instruments found in jazz. The music was progressive enough to appeal to modern tastes and traditional enough to satisfy government nationalism, which became a key feature of the new lyrics, if not the melodies (Mitchell, 2011). “The *Ramwong* Songs of Suntaraporn” is a catalogue of Latin-ballroom-inspired music created by Suntaraporn that further illustrates the modernisation of traditional Thai music by Suntaraporn, who added different instruments and textures. In doing so, Suntaraporn made traditional sounds fashionable. The band appealed to new urban tastes by rearranging folk music with a Western edge, while retaining certain recognisable folk elements, such as *melisma* (Maryprasith, 1999). Over time, this new 1930s-40s genre would become the Western-style popular music that is appreciated by today’s society.

Saxophones were the major addition to traditional *ramwong* performances by Suntaraporn. The band recognised the versatility of the saxophone and it would become a signature piece in their armory. “With a saxophone you can go from jazz to classical music, from Latin to rock and soul. As you can influence the sound of the instrument to a large extent, saxophonists can be equally at home in all those styles (Pinksterboer, 2007, p.2). Thanks to this introduction by Suntaraporn and its acceptance in wider Thai culture, the saxophone has subsequently been included in other traditional Thai ensembles, such as *mor lam* and *lae*. Yet there is no systematic means of marrying modern saxophone tuition with traditional *ramwong* melodies that retain homage to the original wind instruments.

The Cultural Pedagogy of Traditional Thai Music

What is the nature of Thai music instruction? Actually, there is very little guidance from the Ministry of Education about a preferred pedagogy, with only content being stipulated (Narkwong, 2000). The problem with implementing a consistent vision is the disparate nature of Thai schools, some of which are richly resourced and staffed, while others lack both instruments and music teachers (Laovanich, et al., 2020). Not unlike surrounding Southeast Asian societies, Thai music pedagogy is consequently dependent on the instructor. Similar to *maguru panggul*, an Indonesian teaching methodology for gamelan instruction, the Thai master-apprentice dichotomy is governed by heavy demonstration from the expert and absorption by the novice (Jocuns, 2007). Rather than presenting the material in its entirety, it is typical of Thai music pedagogy for the teacher to “transmit

each new composition orally, phrase by phrase” (Miller, 2002). This is irrespective of instrument and is also true for Thai students learning Western instruments from Thai instructors (Rosen, 1999). The learning-by-rote pedagogy is a common feature of traditional Thai education, but in the music sphere can be traced to the inheritance of traditional musical styles by local people in rural villages. This is particularly true for folk music, where teachers would instruct their disciples in their homes or at the local temples (Moro, 2019). Learners and teachers rarely made a written record of their music, which had much to do with illiteracy in the country at the time. Indeed, to some in Western music circles this method of learning-through-imitation may not even be considered teaching at all (Bakan, 1993). As education became Westernised, higher education institutions played a greater role in the transmission of traditional musical culture. It should be noted though that the teachers employed by these institutions were existing players who had learned by “talking, remembering, observing a demonstration and copying a model” (Eambangyung et al., 2012). The traditional pedagogy was thus continued within higher education institutions.

There have been sporadic attempts to Westernise the pedagogy, such as the introduction of the Kodály method by Mrs. Carolyn Kingshill at Payap University, but these have been isolated and temporary (Narkwong, 2000). Actually, there are elements of accepted international music education theory to be found within Thai music education. Alongside the oral/aural transmission, Thai music instructors are expected to instill personal characteristics in their pupils and assume a familial role not unlike the methods advocated by Shinichi Suzuki (Chaingam and Onlamul, 2018). Moreover, the incorporation of Western music within traditional Thai music education points to a “reverse world music pedagogy” (Anderson & Campbell, 2010; Chandransu et al., 2020) that merits further study. Yet, while there are developed curricula that include learning about musical history, musical theory and musical notation, the practical aspect of musical pedagogy for formal Thai musical education has been “superimposed upon traditional methodologies: and remains very similar to informal pedagogy (Frank, 2014; Santos, 2007). With this and the absence of Suntaraporn-specific literature, the researcher saw fit to examine the process of learner development in closer detail through the use of practice material for saxophonists in the *ramwong* style of Suntaraporn.

Methodology

This qualitative investigation was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, academic articles, books, periodicals and other related literature were reviewed to gain understanding on the development of *ramwong*, the history of the Suntaraporn band and their influence on traditional Thai music. Once data had been synthesised according to the research objectives, the researcher identified informants for data collection in the second stage— research and development of practice material for saxophonists learning the *ramwong* style of Suntaraporn. The criteria for selection of informants were professional saxophonists with over ten years of playing experience and links to the Suntaraporn band, either by performing in the group, collaborating with the group or covering Suntaraporn songs in the *ramwong* style. The three saxophonists selected and consenting to participate in the research were: (a) Thamrong Somboonsin, a member of Suntaraporn specialising in Saxophone performance for *ramwong*. Somboonsin worked with: (a) Suntaraporn founder, Khru Eua Sunthornsanan; (b) Yot Wisetsan, a professional

saxophonist with a national reputation for excellence in saxophone playing; and (c) Sekpon Oonsamran, a professional saxophonist known by the stage-name “Go Mr. Saxman”, who has covered many Suntaraporn compositions in his professional career. The work locations of the three respondents were consequently selected to comprise the research area for the second stage of this investigation. Each of these venues was located in Bangkok.

Each of the informants was interviewed to learn how they developed their ability to play *ramwong* saxophone and gather their opinions on the steps student saxophonists must take when practicing the genre. All data was validated by source triangulation to compare the responses of each of the informants and subsequently analysed through analytic induction and typological analysis according to the research objectives. During interviews, the informants were also asked to recommend suitable songs for practising *ramwong* saxophone. Based on these findings, the researcher developed practice materials for saxophonists wishing to learn the *ramwong* style of the Suntaraporn band. Firstly, four compositions played by Suntaraporn and suggested by research informants were identified as possible material for saxophone *ramwong* practice. The four songs were: “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*”, “*Pleng Ramwong Mai Long Euy*”, “*Pleng Reung Songkran*” and “*Pleng Ramwong Loy Krathong*”. The main melody, saxophone melody, chords and techniques used during these songs were then analysed and used to inform creation of song-specific practice material for *ramwong* saxophonists. Two sets of instructional material were presented to the three informants for verification and evaluation by email. The informants were asked to evaluate the material on a five-point Likert rating-scale from 1-5 (Lowest to highest). The experts were asked to evaluate the material in five categories: (a) the ability of the practice sets to meet the research objectives; (b) the accuracy, clarity, and suitability of practice sets; (c) suitability of format and process of practice sets for learning *ramwong* saxophone; (d) quality of practice sets; and (e) benefits of practice sets for the development of academic music instruction.

Upon approval, one of these practice saxophone sets was selected by the researcher for the third stage of the investigation. The chosen set was presented to saxophone undergraduate students to be trialled over a ten-week period. The students were purposively selected from a masters-degree cohort taught by the researcher. All students were saxophonists achieving above-average academic grades on the *Woodwind Skill 5* master’s programme with the Faculty of Education, Phuket Rajabhat University. They were observed by the researcher during practice sessions. The researcher was present as a participant (instructor) during the practice sessions, and the sessions were also video recorded for further analysis. Following the practice sessions, students were interviewed to give feedback on the practice experience. Observations and interview feedback were then analysed and compared to initial expert recommendations to understand the process of developing and educating learners in *ramwong* saxophone in the Suntaraporn style. The results of the research are presented below as a descriptive analysis.

Results

Culture of Local Pedagogy and Selection of Songs

Interviews with the three informants revealed that full knowledge of traditional Thai music is vital for the success of *ramwong* saxophonists. Specifically, respondents emphasised the importance of familiarity with specific characteristics that differentiate each traditional Thai musical genre. Listening was deemed one of the most important skills during practice: “To practise this particular form, it is necessary to understand and remember the main melody. Traditional saxophone education in Thailand requires the learner to watch, listen and remember” (Somboonsin, personal communication, June 3, 2019). These sentiments were echoed by Sekpon Oonsamran and Yot Wisetsan, who considered it “vital to listen to repetitions of the *ramwong* music until it has been understood thoroughly and fluently” (Wisetsan, personal communication, July 3, 2019). Knowledge of the specificities of each traditional musical genre is important, “but especially the melodies, scales and rhythms, including techniques or tricks of the original Thai form that can be incorporated” (Somboonsin, personal communication, June 3, 2019).

After interviews had been conducted, four songs were selected for development of saxophone practice sets: “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*”, “*Pleng Ramwong Mai Long Euy*”, “*Pleng Reung Songkran*” and “*Pleng Ramwong Loy Krathong*”. “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*” is a song with melodies from traditional Thai music, which were originally played with regional wind instruments. The researcher selected this song to epitomise the proliferation of traditional Thai influences on *ramwong* music and the consequent familiarity of saxophonists with traditional playing techniques. “*Pleng Ramwong Mai Long Euy*” was chosen because it is a comparatively easy song to learn and can be practiced using the pentatonic scale common in many Thai folk compositions. Even though “*Pleng Reung Songkran*” and “*Pleng Ramwong Loy Krathong*” are both newly composed songs and not based on folk or traditional Thai music, they are familiar to all Thai people because of their connection to the annual Thai New Year and *Loy Krathong* festivals. As agreed by Thamrong Somboonsin, “*Ramwong* music is derived from folk music and traditional Thai music designed for villagers. The concept is ‘easy listening’, so the main melodies of any practice material or new compositions must fit this mould” (personal communication, June 3, 2019).

Development of Saxophone Drills

The process for creation of saxophone practice sets in the form of *ramwong* was as follows: First, data from interviews with the three expert *ramwong* saxophonists was analysed to extract pedagogical concepts for saxophone learning in Thailand. The results revealed that prospective *ramwong* saxophonists must have a basic understanding of folk song and the characteristics of traditional Thai music. The experts also insisted that listening was a crucial part of the learning process and trainees should be expected to listen to their teacher play the melody before attempting the tune themselves. In addition, the student must be familiar with “the melodic intricacies, scales, chord positions and techniques of traditional Thai music” which are incorporated throughout *ramwong* songs (Oonsamran, personal communication, November 17, 2019). Following this analysis, the

researcher learned how to play *ramwong* songs on the saxophone and selected four exemplar *ramwong* compositions for further development. The main melody, saxophone melody, chords and techniques used during these songs were then analysed. Results informed the creation of practice materials. From the set of four drills, two were randomly shown to the three experts. The two songs selected for verification and further evaluation were “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*” and “*Pleng Ramwong Mai Long Euy*”. The sample set was refined to these two songs because they had stronger links to traditional Thai and folk music playing styles than the festival songs. Experts felt these saxophone practice drills met the research objectives and awarded a high suitability level. All respondents concurred that this practice material was highly suitable for the acquisition of practical saxophone skills. Informants added the comment that this study addressed a gap in modern literature by developing educational material for *ramwong* saxophonists that did not previously exist. Evaluation results are included below in Table 1. The only category with an average evaluation result less than the highest satisfaction level was the accuracy, clarity and appropriateness of the material. This was accompanied with the feedback that some techniques require the learner to have specific listening and playing experiences, thus they felt that ‘written instruction without teacher guidance may never be fully appropriate for this genre’ (Somboonsin, personal communication, June 3, 2019).

Table 1.

Evaluation of practice material for ramwong saxophonists by academic and professional experts

Criteria	Expert	Level of Satisfaction				
		Lowest	Low	Medium	High	Highest
Practice material is comprehensive and consistent with research objectives	Thamrong Somboonsin					X
	Yot Wisetsan					X
	Sekpon Oonsamran					X
Practice material is accurate, clear and appropriate	Thamrong Somboonsin				X	
	Yot Wisetsan				X	
	Sekpon Oonsamran				X	
Practice material is conducive to the learning of <i>ramwong</i> for saxophone	Thamrong Somboonsin					X
	Yot Wisetsan					X
	Sekpon Oonsamran					X
Practice material is of a high quality	Thamrong Somboonsin					X
	Yot Wisetsan				X	
	Sekpon Oonsamran					X
Practice material is beneficial for the development of academic music instruction	Thamrong Somboonsin					X
	Yot Wisetsan					X
	Sekpon Oonsamran					X

The researcher considered “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*” to be the song with the closest links to traditional Thai songs. This practice set was thus selected and presented to undergraduate students. The subjects practised during the second academic term for ten consecutive evenings.

The “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*” Practice Set

The “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*” materials and each of the other practice sets were developed with the same four-part structure: (a) History; (b) The *ramwong* form; (c) Sheet music; (d) Practice drills. Specific details for “*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*” are given below.

Part I – Cultural History of Suntaraporn and Ramwong.

Ramwong is an evolution of traditional *ramtone*. It is the preferred musical genre of rural Thai people. Its name is derived from the Thai words meaning to dance (*ram*) and circle (*wongklom*). Dancers usually partner with members of the opposite gender and dance to percussive rhythms, provided by drums, cymbals and clappers. The theme of the music revolves around courtship, and the lyrics add to the flirtatious atmosphere created by the dance and music. All dancers improvise their movements, and these are determined by the personal style of the performers and their current mood. This particular form of dance gained popularity in urban centres during World War Two and the music was promoted by the government as a method of fostering a national unity and spirit. *Ramwong* appealed to modern tastes and was soon a fixture in social gatherings among all classes. The widespread acceptance of the dance led to adaptation for the stage, which included the addition of music and costumes. These developments led the government, specifically the Thai Public Relations Department, to establish a musical group to merge traditional music and the equally popular musical tastes of the West.

Suntaraporn was created as the consequence of an advertisement posted in 1941 by Mr. Vilat Osatanon, Director-General of the Thai Public Relations Department. Mr. Osatanon sought a band that could play regularly on the radio station set up by the department, and at occasional, formal, government-sponsored events. Khru Eua Sunthornsanan, an established musician of the era, responded by forming Suntaraporn, who played under the department name on the radio and at official events and under the name Suntaraporn privately. Suntaraporn gained great popularity because it was made up of the most skilled musicians who could blend and harmonise multiple genres, sounds and styles. Suntaraporn became famous for their ability to transform outdated traditional music into contemporary, innovative compositions that simultaneously complimented Thai dance movements.

♩ = 95

Main melody

5

9

13

17

21

Figure 1. The main melody (concert key) for “Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk”.

Part II - Understanding Ramwong.

Suntaraporn *ramwong* performances mixed traditional domestic and international styles. The musicians transformed Thai melodies and structures into modern compositions. Therefore, it is important that musicians using this training material first comprehend some basic principles:

1. Players must first have a foundational working knowledge of musical theory, which is necessary for the analysis and explanation of *ramwong* form and structures. The musician must be able to read modern musical notation and should possess a strong comprehension of minor, major and pentatonic scales in addition to knowledge of chords and intervals.
2. Considering the intention of this material is advanced training of saxophonists, the musician must first have appropriate skill in saxophone playing.
3. Suntaraporn *ramwong* performances require the musician to understand the traditional music techniques of Thailand in addition to the tone of original Thai *ramwong*.
4. Improvisation is a key component of *ramwong* that has been retained from its roots in folk traditions. The performer must therefore develop improvisational skill that enables the variation of melodies to suit the atmosphere.

In addition to understanding modern musical theory, the saxophonist must have a complete education in Thai musical concepts and theory.

Part III - Saxophone for Suntarapornramwong: “Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk”

“*Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk*” is based on traditional Thai music. The tempo is fast and the time signature is *alla breve* (cut time), with two minim beats per measure. The metronome mark is $\text{♩} = 95$. The song is played in a G scale (concert key) with the majority of the melody played in a G pentatonic scale (G, A, B, D, E), although there is a C# in the 17th bar. The chords used are I, VI, Vi6 and V (G, Em, Em6 and D7/A). Sheet music for the main melody and saxophone are included below (Figure 1).

Part IV - Saxophone Practice Material: “Pleng Ramwong Dao Prasuk”

The saxophone melody was analysed and specific learning points identified within the music. For example, there is a disjunct melodic motion as shown in the third bar of the saxophone melody where the player is required to skip from G to D (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The 3rd bar of the saxophone melody

Perhaps most interestingly, the saxophone melody incorporates syncopation, which is notably absent from conventional *ramwong* music. This is evident in the seventh and eighth bars (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The 7th and 8th bars of the saxophone melody

Findings were used to compose nine practice sets for lead saxophone, ten sets for the melody and eleven more sets for solo saxophone. Extracts from each set are illustrated below (Figures 4-6). These drills are to be played by the teacher and imitated by the student, as is common in traditional Thai music pedagogy.



Figure 4. Practice 1—lead saxophone.



Figure 5. Practice 10—melody.



Figure 6. Practice 20—solo saxophone.

The practice material was then presented to undergraduate students, who worked through the drills over ten consecutive weekly sessions. When the practice materials were played by saxophone undergraduate students, the researcher observed an ability to reconstruct the required notes properly, but an inability to incorporate accents, techniques and methods associated with traditional Thai performances. The students showed that they could do this only after having been shown or after having listened to an example. This reflection corresponds to the original interviews with key informants who separately attested that “the musician must learn from rote learning and memorisation” (Wisetsan, personal communication, July 3, 2019) and that “the aspiring performer must observe their teacher and copy that style” (Oonsamran, personal communication, November 17, 2019). Interviews revealed that the students were encouraged to learn the *ramwong* music due to prior knowledge of the song. This certainly supports the original selection of familiar songs and reinforces the sentiments of the professional teachers who described familiarity with the melody as a significant advantage for prospective *ramwong* saxophonists. However, the learner needs to know more than the tune before learning to play a *ramwong* song: “It is important for the performer to be familiar with common scales, especially the pentatonic scale, and chord positions for *ramwong*-style music” (Wisetsan, personal communication, July 3, 2019). The origins of *ramwong* are found in the traditional music of indigenous people. Therefore, before learning *ramwong* songs, “the performer must first understand the traditional playing methods” (Oonsamran, personal communication, November 17, 2019). Initially, the interviewees felt unable to use the traditional styles without listening to examples. The students concluded that listening to or, better still, watching a demonstration was a major factor in playing success because the style was so unfamiliar.

Discussion

Thai music is driven by its melody and although there are multiple parts in a single song—these are not harmonised in the same way as the West. Instead, they each play a variation on the main melody that is unique to that particular instrument class. These simultaneous sounds are layered and meet at stressed beats to coincide with the main melody (Morton, 1976). They diverge on unstressed beats. Thai music therefore ebbs and flows from stress point to stress point guided by the percussion instruments (Wright, 1968). The primary reasons for difficulties in self-teaching saxophone melodies for traditional Thai music are the differences between the Thai and Western notation and tuning systems. Traditionally, Thai notation is a memory tool and not something that is strictly adhered to—normally the melody is only written as an outline. As Volk (2006) explains:

The Thai tuning system divides the octave into seven equidistant intervals and there is no standard pitch level ... To learn the complete song with its proper ornamentation, idioms and style, a student must work with a teacher ... Western notation can easily be used to transcribe this as long as the performer realizes that the pitches written are symbolic of the intervallic distances only and not the actual sounds of the pitches since the tuning systems are so different (p. 245)

Therefore, to play Suntaraporn *ramwong* melodies on the saxophone, the musician must first have a working knowledge of traditional techniques. The accents and methods of traditional music are too difficult to explain in abstract terms to learners with no prior

experience of their sound and style. Individuals must listen and watch to develop an appreciation of the musical and technical requirements. This supports many of the advocates of the Thai rote learning system, which is a pedagogy practiced throughout Thai education. Imitation enables the student to develop not only the sounds of their teacher, but also their posture, manners and techniques (Campbell, 1987). Despite being frowned upon by many teachers and scholars in the West and regarded as outmoded (Nolte, 2019), Thai music expert Terry Miller argues that, although “the rote system is very time-intensive ... it's also very thorough—you never forget the music” (Campbell, 1994, p. 22). In support of his opinion, research by Finney and Palmer (2003, p. 51) showed that “auditory feedback during learning significantly improved later recall.” Saxophone training material developed during this research project was standardised using modern international notation but it remains necessary for learners to possess knowledge of traditional music so that they are able to accurately represent authentic *ramwong* sounds in their performance. Historical knowledge of *ramwong* will also accelerate their learning.

Following examination of Thai classical music education, Wisuttipat (2020) concluded that “oral transmission and rote learning are key to transmitting ideas about cultural identity.” The inclusion of a holistic cultural approach in these practice sets is a nod towards national strategies for the maintenance of traditional culture. In order to ensure continued inheritance, it is suggested that the history of significant musicians, such as Suntaraporn, is woven into music curricula at the higher level. Suntaraporn are particularly important due to their huge influence on the evolution of traditional music in Thailand. Clearly there are nationalist connotations associated with the band, but their importance in the evolution of Thai music cannot be overlooked. It is recommended that undergraduate music students become familiar with the basics of Thai music, regardless of their musical major, to ensure that this national cultural heritage is conserved. This has the potential to generate interest and stimulate young musicians to innovate alternative versions of traditional music, as Khru Eua Sunthornsanana did so successfully.

The research informants all identified the importance of recognising characteristics of different genres of traditional music. Consequently, it is recommended that listening activities accompany the practice sets as part of an overall learning method. There should be further investigation of listening as a pedagogical approach in order to incorporate such activities into a complete method that could teach both technique and style. The sets developed during this investigation may be used for saxophone instruction in the *ramwong* style. To secure more accurate results and further suggestions for improvement, it is important that the drills are tested with a greater number and wider variety of students. The researcher would also like to suggest that further research is conducted about other ground breaking developments made by Suntaraporn and how other genres of traditional music have been transformed towards modernity. It is hoped that findings from this investigation could be used in the field of cultural conservation and contribute to the process of standardising saxophone education in Thailand, especially with the inclusion of saxophone musicians in traditional Thai bands.

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Biography

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