

Wai Kru Muay Thai: Thai Cultural of Wisdom

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Introduction

Muay Thai belongs to Thailand's intangible cultural heritage. The origin to this traditional Thai martial art can be traced back to the dawn of the nation's history. It is the art of efficiently using nine body parts viz. two fists, two feet, two knees, two elbows, and the head as weapon (called Nava-arvudh in Thai). Muay Thai is not only important at individual, community, social, and national levels, but also has long plays a vital part in protecting the kingdom's sovereignty. In the past, Muay Thai was a martial art that most Thai men had to learn and train. It is said that Muay Thai is the basic art of fighting, the use of weaponry is a secondary skill, and fighting strategies are the key to victory. To practice Muay Thai, one needs to be wily, astute, and knowledgeable. The Thai Royal Annals note that monarchs usually mastered Muay Thai fighting while high-ranking royals, military noblemen as well as commoners were trained in the martial art for the practice of Muay Thai also helped to optimize the use of weapons such as the Krabi (curved sword), Krabong (short wooden staff), Plong (wooden staff), sword, Ngao (halberd), and Thuan (lance), especially in close fighting. (Saengsawang, 1995; Department of Cultural Promotion, 2016; Suksawang, 2017; Department of Physical Education, 2018; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019)

When the kingdom was not at war, Muay Thai contests became common for those who wanted to pit their strength and fighting skills against worthy opponents. The Law of the Three Seals, Section Miscellany, mentioned boxing as: "117 Article 1-If two persons made a voluntary agreement to box or fight with each other and one of them was hurt, had broken bones or even died, the other would not be penalized". As such, Muay Thai has been important at individual, community, social, and national levels as well as playing a vital role in maintaining the kingdom's sovereignty. (Office of the National Culture Commission, 1967; Department of Cultural Promotion, 2012; Office of Silpakorn University Academic Services, 2012; Department of Cultural Promotion, 2016; Department of Physical Education, 2018; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019)

Muay Thai is a form of close combat fighting with unique characteristics in the utilization of nine body parts as weapons called the "Nine Weapons", which comprise the use of the head, two hands, two elbows, two knees and two feet. There are 108 fighting methods for defense and offence divided into six methods for the head, 24 for the hands, 30 for both elbows, 12 for the knees and 36 for the feet. The striking of the

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nine weapons is based on the principles of physics from centrifugal force, momentum, and flexibility to angling, as well as shielding and attacking with the toughest part of the body to absorb impact and to achieve the most vicious results, which may result in a fatal blow to the opponents. Apart from being a vicious fighting principle, Muay Thai is also considered an art form, a martial art that combines grace and flow, accompanied by rhythmic music from musical instruments; namely, Javanese clarinets, double-headed drums, and cymbals. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019)

The unique characteristics of Muay Thai that make it one of the most refined martial arts are the use of limbs to defend and attack in lieu of shields and weapons. Muay Thai does not rely purely on strength and power. It also depends considerably on techniques, tactics, and strategies. Boxers need to be able to defeat opponents. There are many striking tactics to deliver blows, and they allow the aggressor to attack from many different angles with speed and power, continually keeping his opponent off balance. Muay Thai training comprises three steps viz. The basic step is to learn self-protection before attacking others, i.e., Pong, Pat, Pid, Perd (guard, block, ward-off, and open defense). In the intermediate step, as fighters in the ring, boxers should learn to approach and counterattack, i.e., Thum, Thub, Jub, Hak (slam, press, hold, and break [including eye gouging]). The advanced step is to become a warrior or instructor in case of ear and to serve as an emissary, scout, soldier, squadron leader, and commander-in-chief. This includes the art of killing, which is not commonly taught. The step comprises a stealthy approach, surprise, immobilization, and death blow (breaking of the neck). (Office of the National Culture Commission, 1967; Department of Cultural Promotion, 2012; Office of Silpakorn University Academic Services, 2012; Department of Cultural Promotion, 2016; Department of Physical Education, 2018; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019)

According to ancient tradition, before Muay Thai fighting starts, the Wai Kru to pay homage to the teacher or master of Muay Thai is required. This offers blessings and boosts morale of the fighters. The ritual is accompanied by the Wai Kru. It is not only the way to study the stance and fighting style of the opponent but also the best way to stretch and warm up the body, relieve stress and prepare the body and mind to be ready for battle. Wai Kru, before the fight, is divided into two parts. Part 1: Seating Stances and Part 2: Standing and Dancing. “Kru”, a Thai word, means the person who teaches pupils, “Sid” or who passes on knowledge to pupils. Normally, Krus are highly respected in Thai society. They are knowledgeable and full of perseverance. They practice high moral standards in their way of life, leading very respectable lives. They study hard in order to accumulate knowledge and reveal the knowledge to the pupils without concealing it. They always sacrifice themselves and are patient in performing their teaching commitment until their pupils attain full knowledge and are successful and progress in their passing down profession. They light the candle of wisdom to the pupils and lead them out of the darkness. Krus always has the following three qualities: wisdom, kindness, and purity or without hatred, malice or ill will. Their teaching and guidance play the most important role in the formation of the pupils’ characters. Such a Kru is usually rewarded by his sense of achievement, respect from everyone and an increase in the number of students who are willing to submit to his guidance.

Objectives of study

This study seeks to study the positions of Wai Kru Muay Thai in Northeastern: Muay Korat, Central: Muay Lopburi, Southern: Muay Chaiya and Northern: Muay Tha Sao to be classified, analyzed and explained definition, coherence and overriding.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research using documentary research about the positions of Wai Kru Muay Thai in Northeastern: Muay Korat, Central: Muay Lopburi, Southern: Muay Chaiya and Northern: Muay Tha Sao.

Results

The four Muay Thai styles have the same basic principles of using limbs to create over a hundred means of continuous striking. Practitioners from different parts of the country also developed different tactics, techniques, and skills, “Heavy punch Korat, clever move Lopburi, good tactics Chaiya, rapid Tha Sao”. (Office of the National Culture Commission, 1967; Saengsawang, 1995; Bunchalor, 2000; Thai Life Insurance Public Company Limited, 2002; Kitiarsa, 2003; Sodprasert, 2003; Kitiarsa, 2005; Jumpangoen, 2006; Sriyapai, 2007; Kantamara, 2010; Tapina, 2010; Onsoi & Siriratpiboon, 2012; Satayaprakop, 2012; Department of Cultural Promotion, 2012; Office of Silpakorn University Academic Services, 2012; Sirisompan, 2013; Department of Cultural Promotion, 2016; Suksawang, 2017; Department of Physical Education, 2018; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2019; Photiphanya & Kaewbucha, 2021)

Muay Korat: From the northeastern region comes Muay Korat, a style known for its sheer power. Fighters focus on delivering strong punches and kicks, often overpowering their opponents with brute strength. It's said that a single strike from a Muay Korat fighter can determine the outcome of a match. This is characterized by the “Kaad Chuek” method (binding or wrapping of rope or fabric around both palms and the back of the hands and wrists), the defensive stance, training, and striking methods. Signatures of this boxing style include a heavy and wide side punch called “Wiang Kwai” (Swing the Buffalo).

Muay Lopburi: Central Thailand's Muay Lopburi is a balanced style, combining both offensive and defensive techniques. Fighters are trained to adapt, switching between offence and defense as the situation demands, making it a versatile style suitable for various challenges. Clever and swift offensive and defensive combinations with quick straight jabs. The style is also called “Muay Kiew” as it uses many tactics to distract the opponent. With sharp eyes, the defender employs lightning hands, feet, knees, and elbows.

Muay Chaiya: Originating from the southern part of Thailand, Muay Chaiya is a style that places a strong emphasis on defense. Fighters trained in this style maintain a low stance, making them less vulnerable to attacks. The emphasis is on using elbows and counters to deflect an opponent's strikes. It's a style that requires patience, waiting for the right moment to strike back. Originating in Chaiya District, Surat Thani

Province, this style became well known after the fifth reign, and it also includes the “Thum, Thub, Jub, Hak” (Slam, press, hold, and break) techniques. Muay Thai vernacular was usually coined in rhyme but contained profound meanings such as Pong, Pat, Pid, and Perd (guard, block, ward-off, and open defense).

Muay Tha Sao: The northern regions of Thailand gave birth to Muay Tha Sao. This style is characterized by its agility and swift footwork. Fighters often use their speed to evade attacks and respond with high, powerful kicks. It’s a dance of sorts, with fighters constantly on the move, making them hard to pin down. From Uttaradit Province, the style is showcased by a wide defensive stance, putting the weight into the rear foot, front foot slightly touching the ground for swift movement and long, hard straight punches. The front fist is raised above the shoulder, the other is lower. Another style of Tha Sao created by Phraya Pichai Daab Hak (Phraya Pichai of the broken sword) combines both hard and soft techniques. Striking can be modified in accordance with the situation; learning weak and strong points of the opponent and oneself is a key component.

Muay Thai is one of the most famous martial arts throughout the world, not only for its fighting style but also its unique and perfect blend of arts, music and sports skills. Consequently, the Muay Thai fighting atmosphere is full of excitement and has won a number of people over. Prior to any fight, what has been cultivated and passed on from generation to generation as a tradition is the Wai Khu and Ram Muay or Muay Thai dance.

“Wai Kru Muay Thai” has been with the Thai people for an extensive period of time and has constantly been practiced. It is considered a sacred ritual which pays homage to instructors, parents and teachers, which is auspicious for boxers before fights. At the moment, there are a high number of foreigners learning Muay Thai who also pay attention and study Wai Kru Muay Thai.

Unlike the Wai Kru tradition of Khon, a traditional dance drama of Thailand, which is performed behind a curtain, Wai Kru Muay Thai is performed in the ring. Boxers are required to perform clockwise circles called “Clockwise for Kru” in remembrance of past Muay Thai instructors. In addition, the Wai Kru Muay Thai ritual is also an opportunity to observe and gauge the opponent as well as stretch to relieve mental and physical stress prior to fights.

The positions of Wai Kru Muay Thai in Northeastern: Muay Korat, Central: Muay Lopburi, Southern: Muay Chaiya and Northern: Muay Tha Sao. There are unequal numbers of postures and different names, as well as having different practices, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Positions of Wai Kru Muay Thai

Wai Kru Muay Thai	
Muay Korat	1. Dermthaksinawat 2. Krabbenjangkhapradit 3. Thawaibangkom

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Kobphramaethoranee 5. Yangsamkhum
<p>Muay Lopburi</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thepphanom 2. Krabbenjangkhapradit 3. Thawaibangkom 4. Thawaimadkru 5. Sodsoimala 6. Saonoiprapaeng 7. Labhokmokkhasak 8. Nokyoongfonhang 9. Naraikhwangjak 10. Phraramphaengsorn 11. Khumchoengkru
<p>Muay Chaiya</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Krabbenjangkhapradit 2. Truajlom 3. Yangsamkhum 4. Sualakhang
<p>Muay Tha Sao</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Krabbenjangkhapradit 2. Kobmek 3. Songmek 4. Taimek 5. Sualakhang

When classifying and analyzing the definitions, it was found that 1) worship of holy things, 2) pay homage to instructors, parents and teachers and 3) an opportunity to observe and gauge the opponent as well as stretch to relieve mental and physical stress prior to fights. More details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Definitions of Wai Kru Muay Thai

Definitions	Wai Kru Muay Thai	
worship of holy things	Muay Korat	1. Dernthaksinawat 2. Thawaibangkom 3. Kobphramaethoranee
	Muay Lopburi	1. Thepphanom 2. Thawaibangkom
	Muay Chaiya	1. Krabbenjangkhapradit
	Muay Tha Sao	1. Kobmek
pays homage to instructors, parents and teachers	Muay Korat	1. Krabbenjangkhapradit
	Muay Lopburi	1. Krabbenjangkhapradit 2. Thawaimadkru
	Muay Chaiya	1. Krabbenjangkhapradit
	Muay Tha Sao	1. Krabbenjangkhapradit 2. Songmek 3. Taimek
an opportunity to observe and gauge the opponent as well as stretch to relieve mental and physical stress prior to fights	Muay Korat	1. Yansamkhum
	Muay Lopburi	1. Sodsoimala 2. Saonoiprapaeng 3. Labhokmokkhasak 4. Nokyoongfonhang 5. Naraikhwangjak 6. Phraramphaengsorn 7. Khumchoengkru
	Muay Chaiya	1. Truajlom

		2. Yangsamkhum 3. Sualakhang
	Muay Tha Sao	1. Sualakhang

When analyzing the coherence and distinction, it was found that 1) Wai Kru Muay Thai in Northeastern: Muay Korat, Central: Muay Lopburi, Southern: Muay Chaiya and Northern: Muay Tha Sao is Krabbenjangkhapradit. It has the same name of positions, but movements are not the same, 2) Wai Kru Muay Thai with some similar positions namely, Yangsamkhum is specific Muay Korat and Muay Chaiya, Sualakhang is specific Muay Tha Sao and Muay Chaiya. The names of positions and definitions are the same but movements are not the same, and 3) Wai Kru Muay Thai positions are not the same: Dernthaksinawat, Thepphanom, Kobphramaethoranee, Kobmek, Thawaimadkru, Songmek, Taimek, Sodsoimala, Saonoiprapaeng, Labhokmokkalasak, Nokyoongfonhang, Naraikhwangjak, Phraramphaengsorn, Khumchoengkru, Traujlom, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Coherence and distinction of Wai Kru Muay Thai

Postures	Wai Kru Muay Thai				Coherence	Distinction
	Muay Korat	Muay Lopburi	Muay Chaiya	Muay Tha Sao		
1. Dernthaksinawat	/				none	specific Muay Korat
2. Krabbenjangkhapradit	/	/	/	/	name of position and definition are the same	movements are not the same
3. Thepphanom		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
4. Thawaibangkom	/	/			name of position and movements are the same	specific Muay Korat and Muay Lopburi
5. Kobphramaethoranee	/				none	specific Muay Korat
6. Kobmek				/	none	specific Muay Tha Sao
7. Thawaimadkru		/			none	specific Muay

						Lopburi
8. Songmek			/		none	specific Muay Tha Sao
9. Taimek			/		none	specific Muay Tha Sao
10. Yangsam khum	/		/		name of position and definition are the same	movements are not the same
11. Sodsoimala		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
12. Saonoipra paeng		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
13. Labhokmok khasak		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
14. Nokyoongfon hang		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
15. Naraikhwang jak		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
16. Phraram phaengsorn		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
17. Khumchoeng kru		/			none	specific Muay Lopburi
18. Truajlom			/		none	specific Muay Chaiya
19. Sualakhang			/	/	name of position and definition are the same	movements are not the same

From Table 3, it can be seen that in the similarities and meanings, there are also differences between Wai Kru Muay Thai. They are very different, meaning the positions are not the same both in movement and in the names of the positions. The meaning is moderately different, meaning there are some things that are the

same, such as the names of the positions being the same but the movements being different. The meaning is the same but the name of the position is different. The difference is that the names of the positions are the same and have the same meaning. But they are not treated the same way.

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<Abstract>

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This study seeks to study the positions of Wai Kru Muay Thai in Northeastern: Muay Korat, Central: Muay Lopburi, Southern: Muay Chaiya and Northern: Muay Tha Sao to be classified, analyzed and explained definition, coherence and overriding. The study revealed the positions of Wai Kru Muay Korat: Dernthaksinwat, Krabbenjangkhapradit, Thawaibangkom, Kobphramaethoranee and Yangsamkhum. There are 11 positions of Wai Kru Muay Lopburi: Thepphanom, Krabbenjangkhapradit, Thawaibangkom, Thawaimadkru, Sodsoimala, Saonoiprapaeng, Labhokmokkhasak, Nokyoongfonhang, Naraikhwangjak, Phraramphaengsorn and Khumchoengkru. There are 4 positions of Wai Kru Muay Chaiya: Krabbenjangkhapradit, Truajlom, Yangsamkhum and Sualakhang. There are 5 positions of Wai Kru Muay Tha Sao: Krabbenjangkhapradit, Kobmek, Songmek, Taimek and Sualakhang. Classifying and analyzing the definitions, it was found that 1) worship of holy things, 2) pay homage to instructors, parents and teachers and 3) an opportunity to observe and gauge the opponent as well as stretch to relieve mental and physical stress prior to fights. The coherences were Krabbenjangkhapradit, Thawaibangkom, Sualakhang and Yangsamkhum.

Key words : Wai Kru, Muay Thai, Thai Cultural, wisdom