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## The Role and Transformation of Nora Performing Art as Recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage

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### Abstract

Nora is a valuable indigenous cultural heritage associated with the way of life of southern people for many generations. It represents a perfect combination between “science” and “arts”. Nora embeds a science of performing arts related to faith, religious rituals, superstition, spirits, deities and deceased ancestors. On the Nora is art in it aesthetic, delicate and strong moves to the rhythm of the unique music. There are exquisitely beautiful costumes and the style of the show is unique and unique. This enables Nora to live in a society that is dynamic or a society that is constantly changing. Nora has been declared Intangible Heritage of wisdom by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2021 under the name “Nora, Dance Drama in Southern Thailand”.

The article on the role and transformation of Nora performing art as recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage is an academic article that aims to analyze the role and transformation of Nora performing art as recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage. It consists of the following topics: (1) The role and background of Nora performance that appears in literature, (2) Nora performance as an intangible cultural heritage, (3) Nora performance as an art of cultural heritage, (4) The role of Nora performance in today's society, (5) The evolution of Nora's performance over time, (6) Factors or conditions that cause Nora performance to be recognized as a world intangible cultural heritage. The analysis results found that in an era where the world is facing rapid change, Nora still prevails an important southern Thai culture rooted in the local area of the south. It is one of the cultures of mankind and progressing in parallel with the changes. However, Nora still plays the same role in creating entertainment, beliefs, rituals, reflecting the progress of society. Including the transfer of knowledge, ideas, beliefs, faith from one generation to the next.

**Keywords:** Nora, Role, Change, Intangible Cultural Heritage

## Introduction

Southern Thailand is tied to a long history and blessed with prosperity and a variety of nobles. This area was formerly part of the Malay Peninsula or Golden Peninsula (Wheatley, 1961).

In the past, it was an incredibly important route connecting the oceans. These conditions established the south of Thailand as a port city. There followed an exchange of goods, cultures, religions, beliefs and settlements of diverse communities which are evidenced by traces of historical archeology such as ancient sites, antiquities, and architecture. Therefore, the region is characterized by a variety of cultures, traditions, religions, and ways of life. Local performing arts are diverse, such as Nora, Nang Talung, Ma Yong, Li Ke Pa, and Ka Lor. Nora is a show with unique identity representative of the southern community for a long time.

Nora is a valuable local cultural heritage that has been associated with the way of life of southern people for many generations. It is described as both “science” and “art” working in harmony. In terms of “science”, it includes the science of Nora performing art and those related to beliefs, religious rituals, superstition, spirits, deities and deceased ancestors. Nora is therefore a sacred form of ritual performance entailing traditions and practices that have been passed down from generation to generation, such as Nora Rong Kru or Nora Longkhru, crowning ceremony or tying-large cloth dance ceremony, ornament wearing dance ceremony, bracelet wearing ceremony, medium ceremony to contact the spirit of deceased ancestors. All of these are tools for worshipping the spirits of the ancestors expressing gratitude to the ancestors and teachers. Additionally, in addition, in the past, Nora was believed to possess healing power against physical illnesses and mental sufferings (Burarat, 2013). The word “art” means a performing art of beauty, strength, hardiness and rhythmic movement (Petkaew, 2016) through the transmission of the five elements of Nora, namely (1) Nora’s costume is aesthetic, unique and refined (2) Nora is accompanied by musical instruments producing the rhythm with a defining melody and unique style of music. (3) Nora has a melody that communicates hidden mottos, ideas, social contexts, and humors from the performer to the audience. (4) Nora has beautiful, graceful, strong dance moves and styles, and (5) Nora has a distinctive and unique performance style (Nakhvirote, 1995, p. 2). Despite the society’s rapid dynamic, incorporating these elements, Nora adapts well through those changes.

Social and cultural change is a parallel context in which Nora is inseparably involved. It can be stated that social changes are characterized by structural and systemic evolvments in terms of, for example, political structures, governments, laws, economic systems, trade, transportation and technology, etc. Regarding cultural change, it is a profound change conceiving deeply in the roots, ways of living of members in society (Nartsupa, 2010). Despite consistency between the social and cultural change, the changes in Thai society are the global society is aligned with that of the global society which is to focus on structural development and economic

systems so intensively that cultural development becomes neglected. Hence, one downside to it is local society being separated from urban society which results in trivialization of local performing arts. In the case of Nora, it is a performing art that has been in society for a long time. It journeyed through the periods in which it reaches its height in popularity as well as its downtime. However, Nora was able to survive in the midst of those social change. Since it has adapted by reconstructing a new meaning that corresponds to the social context while still maintaining the essence of Nora with a cultural reproduction process during the year 2019-2021. Nora has been extensively presented through various media channels because the Department of Cultural Promotion proposes Nora as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). Also, Nora has been registered by UNESCO as Thailand's Intangible Cultural Heritage, after Khon (masked play), and Thai massage registered in 2018 and 2019 respectively.

Hence, this topic was chosen for analysis, and six specific objectives were formulated for the study, as follows: (1) The role and background of Nora performance that appears in literature, (2) Nora performance as an intangible cultural heritage, (3) Nora performance as an art of cultural heritage, (4) The role of Nora performance in today's society, (5) The evolution of Nora's performance over time, (6) Factors or conditions that cause Nora performance to be recognized as a world intangible cultural heritage.

### **1. The Role and Background of Nora Performance that Appears in Literature**

Nora is the south's performing arts with a long story but there is no document providing a comprehensible record of the story. Nora is inherited through generations over a long period of time which leads to some parts of the legend being distorted and further refined, branching into multiple versions of legends which is affected by the social context in that era, including cultural ways and beliefs of people in each era. The Nora myth is a diverse narrative about supernatural stories holiness, faith, mystery, miracle and moral teachings. The author has studied and synthesized the Nora myth and the legend of Nora can be summarized as follows

Legends being told through narratives is a form of storytelling of Nora through different beliefs and historical evidence (1) Nora legend based on evidence from His Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, 1965), as documented in the book of Inao Drama Legends. Legend had it that Khun Satttha performed Nora to his height of fame in the Ayutthaya period. However, he was banished from Ayutthaya after committing an offense. He journeyed through (2) Koh Si Chang and disembarked at Nakhon Si Thammarat province. After that, the form of Nora performance was later passed on in Nakhon Si Thammarat until it became popular and widespread (3) The legend was based on the book of Thai Games (Tramote, 1997), which is a supernatural tale. According to the legend, Phra Thepsingha and Mother Si Ganga were a married couple and had talent in performing Thai drama to the extent in which even angels were so fascinated by the performances that they neglected their duty to be in attendance of God Shiva. God Shiva massively angered by such incidence then set up a big theater to compete. According to

this myth, it later became the custom of Nora that having to tie a red embroidered cloth in the middle of the shed, or other poles as deemed appropriate instead. Legend of Lakhon Chatri (Chatri drama) of the Fine Arts Department was mentioned in the Traditional Thai Game (Tramote, 1997) and (4) the legend of Nang Nuan Thong Samlee, Daughter of Thao Thotsawong and Lady Suwandara. When growing up, the goddess made Nang Nuan Thong Samlee pregnant without a husband, so her father banished her by putting her on the raft which floated to Koh Si Chang. When her son was delivered, the deity gave him the name Phra Thepsinghara and conjured up companions named Pran Bun and Na-Gak Pran for Phra Thepsinghara to play with. There was one-time Phra Thepsinghara in his sleep were shown 12 dance poses by deities and also given. The deity made Khun Si Satta Kru Nora (Nora Teacher) and created a boat for all the people to return to Ayutthaya. Along the way, they roamed and danced around until Thao Tsawong summoned them to court and discovered that they were his clan. They were welcomed and so continued to dance. The three Nora myths cited as examples are controversial and controversial tales that were later resolved by the Nora dance. Therefore, it is the starting point of Nora. and has been transmitted to the present day

The legend of Nora is transmitted through oral literature and underwent the process of modification and refinement according to social changes. However, Nora is continuously passed on to the present day and also possess a unique value and identity of the southern community. Nora portrays faith and so It has been declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization or UNESCO (UNESCO).

## **2. Nora Performance as an Intangible Cultural Heritage**

The art of performing Nora is a legacy of wisdom that has been handed down from for generations. It contains parts related to faith, religious rituals, superstition, spirits, deities and ancestors who have passed away. Nora is essentially a sacred ritual performance dated to the times of ancestors. In addition, it implies doctrine for community members to unitedly through the performance of Nora Rong Kru or Nora Long. This is a belief-related ritual linked to Buddhism regarding the ritual that has been passed down from generation to generation and closely knitted to the way of life southern people. Nora is intended for three important objectives: (1) To worship and express gratitude to the spirits of the ancestors who have passed away. This is to convey the belief of gratitude and it must be demonstrated through rituals and beliefs in order for the spirits of the deceased ancestors to protect their descendants from dangers. Likewise, If the descendants neglect the practice, they will be punished. This, therefore, is a process of cultivating the identical perception and social norms form: being a person of modals, have gratitude and respect for elders. The ritual is between people and sacred beings committed under promises between them. There will be vows or wishes made such as asking for fortune, recovery from illnesses. Then, when the wishes have been granted, a ritual is performed to pay homage to symbolize

promise fulfillment. Nevertheless, if they neglect to fulfill the obligations, there will be followed punishments which could be in the form of illnesses, a dangerous event, etc. Paying homage or locally referred to as “Mei” is socialization for people in society orienting people to have honesty and taking responsibility for their own words. In a similar vein, it is to teach that ignorance over one’s words induces penalties by celestial beings. As for the final objective (2) To perform a ceremony “crowning ceremony (Krob Kru Nora)”, “Krob Serd” or “Large Cloth Tying” for the new generation of Nora performers. Those partaking in this ritual will become a complete Nora and is accepted by the Nora circle. This ritual is to create awareness of being Nora, meaning that the customs and rituals of Nora also come as responsibilities. This also includes behaviors under social norms such as respect for teachers, one who imparts knowledge and skills for a complete transformation into Nora. Various forms of Nora rituals are a social organization process with a long history. It is a practice that has been around for a long time, but there may be some adjustments so that Nora remains compliant with the current social context. The goal is to establish the same set of beliefs under which community members live, which include gratitude, respect for elderly and teachers, including being a member of society and conforming to the norms and beliefs of society.

### **3. Nora Performance as an Art of Cultural Heritage**

Nora performing arts is a cultural heritage passed down from generations to generations. It is full of beauty, strengths and grace, and it is accompanied by the music, singing, and dance moves making Nora a unique performing art of distinctive identity with five components (Nartsupa, 2010, p. 10)

#### **3.1 Nora’s Costume is Beautiful, Unique and Refined**

The patterns of beads composing the Nora’s colorful costume portray local wisdom. It is a handicraft designed with delicate colorful patterns which are both traditional and modern in design. The colors were aesthetically presented according to the taste of the owner. Multiple pieces of bead ornaments were combined to cover the upper part of The Nora performer’s body. The bead accessories are gracefully connected with the metal ornaments together. Bead accessories are handmade and also consists of decorations that are unique to the upper part of Nora, including the left shoulder cover and right shoulder cover, bracelet being straps of beads as a breastplate, the left and right strings or breast chains (Sangwan) with two strings crossed for hanging the left and right wings (Seagull’s wings). There is a name of a Thai decorative pattern attached at the back to force the straps to properly cross over each other. The frame is used to wrap around the chest, used by both women and men to bake the neck. Neck ornament (Ping Kore) being two pieces of triangular-shaped bead ornament for wearing around the neck and the back. Hip ornament (Ping Poke) is a piece of trapezoidal-shaped bead accessory to be put over the sarong for a neat and beautiful look. The elements of Nai Rong Nora's costume or the main actors consist of 9 pieces of accessories in Nora legend, made of silver or metal. Those include

breastplate or Tab, 1 piece of chest accessory, 2 pieces of wings (Seagull's wings) at the left and right end of Sangwan, 1 piece of name of Thai decoration attached to the back for forcing the line of Sangwan to properly cross, 1 piece of girdle decorated on the waist, "Hai-Mon" or 2 pieces of upper-arm bracelets and 2 pieces of arm bracelets. In addition, there is still Na-Plao, which is a straight-cut pant to be worn as innerwear. There is usually embroidery at the end of the leg. It is worn with a brocade worn over on top. A brocade worn over the trunk can be either a floral-pattern cloth or a plain-colored cloth which is worn on top of Na-Plao. It is usually tight-fitting and high-brace, in a way similar to the decorative cloth hanging from the front waist, made of three-strip cloth which are a colorful transparent cloth hanging on the left and right in the front. Wings or tails or Hang-Hong (Swan's tail) is originally made of a buffalo's horn but nowadays, it is made of metal and shaped like a pair of bird's wings. A tip of the wings is raised up and tied together in a tassel made of colored threads. Hang-Hong is an element connecting Nora with being the character Kinnaree in the Jataka story Phra Suthon-Manora. Nail, finger-wears are made of brass or silver and their tips are strung with rattan decorated with small beads. It is popular to wear them in 4 fingers on one hand. Wearing the nails promote the quick move of hand position and fingers such as pinched fingers, gestures with the fingers or slashing poses to captivating and outstanding while dancing. The Nora bracelet made of brass in the shape of a ring is used worn on the wrist, 5-10 bands on each ankle and so changing the posture delivers excitement among the audience. Nora's costumes are not only precious in terms of beauty, but also serves to communicate the meaning of the Nora performance such as Serd – a headdress worn by Nai Rong or the main character, resembling a tapered-top crown decorated with Serd blossoms resembling small lotus petals. It has a forehead's ornament and ear ornament. Ceremonial Serd ceremony can be distinguished by holy threads and only attending the Nora's ritual can wear this type of Serd.

### **3.2 Nora Comes with Musical Instruments and a Unique Performance**

Nora instrument focuses more on percussive instruments producing rhythm rather than melody. There are a total of 6 types: (1) Tab: the main instrument for playing, controlling and changing the rhythm according to the performer's dance, or known as a rhythmic instrument. Melodies (2) cylindrical drum: another crucial musical instrument. Like Tab, it serves to produce crisscrossing sound against that of Tab. In one Nora ensemble, there is only one cylindrical drum which has different sound characteristics depending on the size and weight of each drum (3) Double gong: another rhythmic instrument producing treble and bass sounds. Most of the time, Key 4 and Key 8 or Key 4 and Key 9 will be used depending on the voice of the verse singer (4) small cup-shaped cymbal: a rhythmic instrument played in conjunction with double gongs. Usually, at one corner of a double gong base, there will be one tied hanging with a string so that when a chorus singer hits a gong, he can be using the other hand to hit the hanging cymbal altogether. (5) Wooden clapper (Trae): it is another important instrument in

the performance of Nora Made from materials that can be found locally such as bamboo. There are two types commonly available Double Trae or Trae Phuang, and (6) Oboe: it is a musical instrument for playing the melody accompanying the rhythm of the Nora ensemble. Characteristics of its turning shapes, patterns and lines are unique to the craftsmanship of the southern region. The name is pronounced “Pi Tai” in a southern dialect meaning a southern Oboe. As for the orchestra, it is divided into (1) Solo performance, which is the practice of skills and studying of the characteristics of musical instruments to learn how the sound is generated from each type of the instruments and how it can be played to provide the sound; (2) Orchestral ensemble, which is to play each type of the instruments together with combination of forms, rhythms, melodies, as well as the singing-along with the music that uses various verses to be sung. How an instrument is performed and how it is orchestrated to create melodious sounds in harmony with one another with different playing methods necessitates strategies. Therefore, the rhythm that occurs is important. Nowadays, musical instruments and the style of how Nora music is played has evolved through eras. There has been an integration of electric musical instruments for amplified volume and excitement. In terms of the style of playing, it will be adjusted according to the era and the taste of the Nora audience in each era.

### **3.3 There is a Melody that is Communicated from the Performer to the Audience Hidden in Mottos, Ideas, Social Contexts, and Humor**

Nora's singing verse is composed with a unique character and identity of the Nora performance. Composition of Nora poems or singing verses of Nora plays an important part on developing good impression of Nora performers on audience in terms of attention and popularity. Poems are written in local dialects and communicated with melodies and rhythms of the music. There are 2 styles of Nora's singing, consisting of (1) Singing verses with dance poses. This are verses that Nora performers perform along with dance moves, consisting of Ta Kru Son (Master teaching pose), Ta Sorn Rum (Dance teaching pose) and Ta Pratom (Elementary poses). The singing verses that accompany Rum Tam Bot such as Bot Pan Na (Face turning verse), Bot Si To, Bot Pleng Tab Pleng Tone or singing verses that accompany the performance of the story. Each group of Nora performers sings these songs differently depending on the skills or the fashion from which they inherited and (2) Singing verses without dance poses: This is composed only to be sung without any dance moves to go along. Verses categorized into this group include include: Bot Gad Kru, Bot Chern Kru (Teacher invitation verse), Bot Wai Kru (Homage to teacher verse), Bot San-tern Kru (Nora master hymns), Bot Na Man (Before-the-curtain verses), Bot Lung Chak (Behind-the-scene verses), Bot Nai Hong, Bot Lang Man (Behind-the-curtain verses). Nora's singing verses also retain their original forms, such as Nora's ceremonial verses or Nora's mythological



hymns and in the part that has changed according to social evolvement by incorporating events or talks-of the town into Nora performances

### **3.4 Nora Provides Aesthetic Dance Poses of Grace and Strength**

Performances are equivalent to rituals. Dance is respected as one branch of sciences involved in Nora performances which every Nora performer must learn to perform. Nora. Many terms are coined in reference to dance processes or dances. For example, Sad Ta means to dance and to showcase dance styles and Krai means to dance. Usually, in the past, each of the Nora performers in one Nora troupe would take turn dancing until everyone got to complete it. However, up to two performers will be required when there is Tee-Bot or Tam-Bot. Hence, on a one-person-dance occasion, the dance process and choreograph will vary from one performer to another according to each person's personality as advised and designed by Nora Master. Nevertheless, with an increasing number of Nora performers, Nora then develops the knowledge transfer of the dance process with emphasis on beautiful harmony and little focus on Nora performers' individual personality. However, Nai Rong or Head of the Nora troupe will have to perform a solo-dance to prominently showcase dancing ability on various occasions such as Pra-chan Rong (Troupe Duet), performances and ceremonies. Nora's signature dance is called Ta-Kru Dance (Narksen, 2020, p. 83), which is accompanied by lyric-free music. The dance process of Ta-Kru can be alternatively called such as Rum, Pleng Kru, Ta Kru Rum, Ta Sib-Song, Rum Sib-Song Ta (Twelve-posed dance). Choreograph of Ta-Kru dance consists of 12 dance poses believed to be Nora's major dance poses of the utmost importance. Owing to such value, Ta-Kru dance stands out with its calm, graceful, intense and sacred poses performed in a harmonious relationship between the dance poses and the rhythmic melodies. Therefore, significant rituals or ceremonies often requires Ta Kru dance used to dance, as can be observed from the dance offering to Master or Rum Na San in the Nora Rong Kru ritual. Another frequent scene is the dances in homage paying ceremonies or as the offerings of deities. An absence of Ta Kru means incompleteness. In modern times, the dance style has been modified to combine with other forms of performance to create interest and reach for a wider scope of the Nora audience.

### **3.5 Nora has a Distinctive and Unique Style of Performance**

Nora has a distinctive and unique style of venues for the performance and rituals related to Nora called "Rong Nora" (Nora shed) which can be divided into 2 types, consisting of (1) Rong Kru for performing Nora rituals. Its architectural style is marked by rectangular-shaped floorplan with the front of the shed facing to the north or south called a thatched gable roof. The middle of the gable is covered with Chang (2) General shed is rectangular in shape, facing any directions except for the west. This type of the Nora sheds has no fixation over sizes but its roof slopes backwards and without supporting poles. The front of the stage is left open in all



three directions. In addition to Rong Nora, there is also Nora group's management called Nora Troupe referring to a group of individuals to perform the Nora performance. Each of the performers is assigned to different roles within a team. In general, the number of Nora troupe members falls between 12-15 persons and Nora troupes invited to perform in ceremonies or events prioritize commercial entertainment with the number of performers rising to 20-15.

1) Nora performers or dancers are categorized into different groups depending on the characteristics of performances, namely Head of Nora Troupe, whom be either a man or a woman. Nora Yai (Nora master) refers to a scholar in Nora performance and troupe management. Dancers will be performing Nora poses to Nora music and Pran (Hunter) acts on the plotted role with emphasis on humor and entertainment in a performance.

2) Musician or ensemble plays orchestral music to provide rhythms, consisting of 5-6 members.

3) Mor (Shaman of a Nora troupe) is a traditional medicine man whose role to prevent evil magic or evil influences, and perform certain rituals on behalf of the troupe head. Mor can be a senior former Nora performer but impeccably knowledgeable about evil magic.

Considering changes in Thailand's southern society under the influence of contemporary global fluctuations brought about by economic advances, social and cultural development, all of which fueled further by roles of technologies, how much the components of Nora has adapted to those emerging novelties depends on consumers. While some of the components exhibit drastic shifts from their original outlooks such as costumes, venues, music etc, the crux and core defining the essence of Nora remains absolutely intact which indicates the spirit of a unique performance to southern character.

#### **4. The Role of Nora Performance in Today's Society**

Addition to being a sophisticated southern performance, people in the south also acknowledge the role that this branch of art has had in a southern society. Despite certain roles having been already compromised according to changing contexts including both betterments and complexities, local social dynamic can never be separated from life of the people.

##### **4.1 Nora Acts as a Means of Communication in Beliefs and Rituals**

Nora serves as a communication tool in beliefs and rituals, especially the beliefs and rituals regarding the spirits of deceased ancestors. It serves as protection against evil and various harms that will occur to the descendants. At the same time, it also serves to punish children for violating customary practices or neglecting the rituals regarding Nora. This role is conveyed through the process of performing Nora Rong Kru which has the following goals (1) to serve as a spiritual ceremony of ancestors, also known as Kru Mor Nora, which represents

respect and remembrance showing gratitude to seniors and teachers and to create solidarity in kinship, (2) to be used in homage-paying ceremonies or “Mei”, including other rituals such as Yeap Sen, cutting hair bun, etc., and (3) to be used in the Serd crowning ceremony or tying-large-cloth ceremony for new generation performers, also known as “Krob Kru Nora” (Nora crowning ceremony), which represents the acceptance of new Nora performers. Such beliefs and rituals also play a pivotal role in Nora performers and the way of life of people in southern society in the manner of conscious reproduction and ideology (Cultural reproduction) through generations (Kaewthep & Hinviman, 2010, p. 68). Shorten ritual forms such as Nora, offering materials for rituals have been modified according to the convenience and status of the ceremonies.

#### **4.2 The Role in Entertainment**

Most performing arts of all kinds are primarily aimed to entertain. For Nora, it aims to entertain the audience through the music, the singing verses, and the dance process. These three components harmonize perfectly and conjure up the rhythm, the melody, the content and the authentic typical dance moves. In addition, Nora also integrates events that were popular in that era through poems and dialogue. Therefore, it is a field of southern society (Kaewthep & Hinviman, 2010, p. 558) by utilizing such characteristics as a social arena to compete for access to resources or capital, culture and others. Under these circumstances, this means a spatial battle against other performing arts as well. In this regard, Nora’s role is mainly to create entertainment for those passionate about this type of performance. However, with today’s technological and cultural exchange, it enables members a broader society, namely the global society, to learn, exchange, or adopt it and Nora has modified in accordance with the changes in a way that it becomes more enjoyable, exciting and more accessible to the tastes of people in today’s society.

#### **4.3 The Role of Income Generation and Career**

Because performing arts is a form of cultural capital in an institutional manner that requires knowledge, practice and accumulation to the degree in which it all matures and flourishes into value. The Nora troupe plays to its strength in combining a person itself and props such as costumes, musical instruments and rules or requirements. As a result, Nora performance is a professional performing art which can be practiced for a living through performing the show, creating performance props and teaching as Nora Master. That is because there is head of Nora troupe, Nora grandmasters (Nora Rong Yai), performers, composers or musicians in an ensemble, and Mor Nora (Shaman). Nai Rong will allocate the earning to everyone after deducting some amounts for the essentials. As for the income from the production of performance props such as Nora and Serd etc., which require craftsmanship, there will be very few people capable of this, significant income from production and distribution of the fine-quality props to the Nora troupes who performs Nora and those who are interested in Nora.

As for the income from being kru Nora (Nora master) since it involves specialty of highly expertized performers who are publicly accepted, the earning depends on depth of knowledge recognized when invited to workshops, training or seminars. The amount of such income is correlated with reputation.

Although Nora generates income and career, only some Nora troupes succeed in turning it into a stable career, most Nora performers need to pursue other occupations at the same time. However, having an income and such a career helps to conserve the Nora performing arts in southern society.

Nora is a performing art that can be commercially developed. It is divided into three parts consisting of (1) the careers of members of the Nora troupe who receive compensation through performing in various forms, including Nora Rong Kru and shows for entertainment. This helps to generate income for members of the Nora troupe, ranging from the head of the Nora group or Nora Yai, performers, ensemble musicians and Mor Nora (2) Profession derived from producing, and creating Nora performance props, such as the Nora costume which requires specific skills in craftsmanship as stringing Nora bead pendants, making Serd Nora or carving a banana tree into Nora characters for a show (3) Knowledge communicant or Nora master who uses herself as a medium to share Nora's experience and knowledge through teaching, trainings or seminars, with compensation depending on each Nora master's reputation and knowledge depth of Nora. Income Nora performing art is the Exchange Value which is capital called Cultural Capital that has been accumulated and passed on through generations. Nora performance is one form of capital that requires practice and accumulation to a degree at which the skills can be of economic value and generate income for Nora performers. Also, Nora is cultural capital in the form of an institution – Nora troupe. A Nora performer known to be an apprentice of well-recognized Nora troupes gaining lots of public acceptance, he/she will also have Cultural Capital in an institutionalized form. The performers add value to the capital of the institutional form, the ability or skills of the performer (Embodied Form) related to Nora performance such as dancing, verse singing, Nora music playing, Pran Nora show. Also, the unique personality of an individual is a capital that can be converted into value.

#### **4.4 Nora as a Portrayal of Social Conditions**

Nora is a performing art communicating meaning of southern communities but the meaning of Nora is subject to life cycle of sign undergoing definitional modification as influenced by conditions and social eras. In the past, Nora portrayed social hierarchy owing to its status of a superior performance for royal court exclusively reserved for courtiers. Thus, it conveyed sophisticated identity of high society over those periods. After achieving common popularity and recognition as the south's performing art, its pre-existing meaning changes into that representing the identity and status of local southern communities. In present eras, change in communication of Nora's meaning is being conditioned by advanced communication technologies: the original

function in communicating meanings among the locals has transcended into the digital age confined to no space and time. Therefore, the meaning of Nora adjusts in sync to changes of the eras but original meanings or the crux and core of Nora remains crucial and this is what matters the most in the thriving of Nora against social change. In other words, Nora mirrors social imagery of that particular era through numerous forms. For example, in the past, Nora was a sophisticated form of performing art illustrating the overall social landscape in that particular era in that people in general assigns greater value to living a life such as settlement and foraging than social activities or entertainment. This resulted in restriction of performing art to noble classes. In later days, when Nora becomes popular and widespread, Nora transforms into an identity of southern social communities reflected through prosperity in the society in a way that the social members start participating and assimilating into social activities through a Nora performance. The role of participants incredibly varies ranging from performers to audience in leisure time. Nora described the society in that era as a society with organizational, structured and fixed schedules of work as well as social activities. Nora therefore becomes popular and widespread in the southern society in that era and Nora portrays the society in a present era through changing means of communication. Communication that has changed from the former in the form of a Nora show in a form of Nora performance shed. At present, it has changed into a show available on online media channels, reflecting the society that has changed the form of communication to a digital society with the development of communication technologies.

Nora is a performing art unseparated from the lives of people in each era. It is part of a social process that has traditionally been practiced through generations. The role of Nora changes according to social conditions. In one era, Nora communicated the meaning of rituals that requires a process.

### **5. The Evolution of Nora's Performance Over Time**

In Every society has a characteristic of being dynamic, meaning it is constantly in motion and changing over time. This leads to social change, which occurs when any social system undergoes transformation, whether it be in a positive or negative direction (The Royal Institute Dictionary, 2006). Examples of these systems include communication, education, politics and governance, economy, and healthcare, among others. When any system within a society undergoes change, it inevitably affects other related systems within that society. These social changes, in turn, have an impact on the transformation of traditions, beliefs, customs, and culture. Consequently, the art of Nora performance undergoes changes that are interconnected with the transformations in other social systems, as follows:

1. An education system is linked to the changes in Nora. In the past, the education system was not widespread and had not expanded significantly into local regions. As a result, rural societies continued to transmit their lifestyles, customs, and culture from one generation to the next in a tightly-knit manner. This was due to the strong bond of kinship within large families living in the same area. Thus, the art of Nora performance served as a social tool for enhancing various skills, such as dancing, music, agile movements from the performances, and composing different forms of poetry. This allowed the tradition of Nora to be passed down continuously from one generation to the next. However, as the education system has changed in contemporary society, the art of Nora performance has also transformed in accordance with the educational system's format. For example, the development of a standardized and quality Nora curriculum (Waiyawek & Tongkam, 2021), as well as its inclusion in school curriculums or online courses (Waiyawek, 2023), has made it more accessible and diverse. The changing education system has thus led to changes in Nora as well.

2. An economic system, which has shifted from an agricultural society to an industrial one, has led to changes in the way people live. Previously, the emphasis was on agricultural work, and people had periods of rest during which they would engage in communal activities. However, as the economic system has changed, people in society have started to prioritize work with clearly defined working hours, such as clocking in and out at their jobs. The types of activities they engage in during their leisure time have also changed. The economic system impacts the art of Nora performance, as it can be said that when the economy is doing well, people will focus on entertainment-related activities, such as watching Nora performances. In contrast, when the economy is not doing well, individuals in society will prioritize activities essential to their livelihood over recreational ones.

3. A communication system, or the changing communication technology, inevitably affects social change. Scholars from the Nora Research Institute have pointed out (Kaewthep & Hinviman, 2010, p. 558), when communication technology changes, society changes as well. The communication format of Nora performance art in the past mainly involved interpersonal communication, emphasizing face-to-face interaction (Face to Face) and two-way communication between performers and audiences. However, with the advent of communication technology playing a role as a tool for communication between performers and viewers, such as performances via online social media, the role of Nora performances in providing entertainment has increased, while its role in fostering relationships between people within society has diminished.

4. Cultural exchange is another important factor that leads to changes in Nora. As communication technology connects society and people, it results in the exchange of information, news, and cultural changes. New cultures play a role in influencing traditional culture. For example, Nora music performances originally used Nora instruments such as the Thap drum, Kong drum, Hong drum, Trae, Ching, and Pi. However, nowadays,

international instruments have been incorporated to create novelty, excitement, and inspiration, such as using keyboards to enhance the potential of Nora music (Laosuk, 2008). In addition, changes in costumes also reflect the cultural exchange, with creative fusion and adaptation to modern times, making them different from the traditional forms.

## 6. Factors or Conditions that Cause Nora Performance to be Recognized as a World Intangible Cultural Heritage

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines intangible cultural heritage as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, tools, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated with communities or groups of people who accept them as part of their cultural heritage (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, n.d.). In Thailand, the term “Intangible Cultural Heritage” is used according to the Act on the Promotion and Protection of Cultural Wisdom Heritage B.E. 2016 (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2016).

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage outlines five objectives: (1) to protect intangible cultural heritage; (2) to ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of communities, groups, and individuals concerned; (3) to raise awareness at the local, national, and international levels of the importance of intangible cultural heritage and mutual appreciation; (4) to provide cooperation and assistance between countries; and (5) to establish the scope and characteristics of intangible cultural heritage in five domains: (1) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle; (2) performing arts; (3) social practices, rituals, and festive events; (4) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and (5) traditional craftsmanship.

Nora is an intangible cultural heritage, well-known and popular in the southern region of Thailand. It falls under the category of “performing arts” and has unique characteristics and identity that reflect the southern Thai society across various periods. Nora was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO during the 16th Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICS-ICH) in 2021 under the name Nora, Dance Drama in Southern Thailand. It is the third Thai element inscribed on the list, following Khon, masked dance drama in Thailand in 2018, and Nuad Thai, traditional Thai massage in 2019 (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, n.d.).

Nora’s significant characteristics that led to its inscription as an intangible cultural heritage can be summarized in four aspects: Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time; Inclusive; Representative; and Community-based (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, n.d.). The details are as follows:

### **The first aspect: Traditional, contemporary, and living at the same time**

It refers to the fact that Nora is a long-standing cultural heritage of the southern region of Thailand. It has evolved through various periods and adapted to the context of society. A study on the transformation of local performances and their relationship with the socio-cultural context in the Songkhla Lake Basin, with a focus on Talung and Nora performances after the governmental reform during the reign of King Rama V (1894 - present), has divided the transformation of Nora into four periods:

1. Period 1 (from the oil lamp era to the storm lamp era): This covers the time from the governmental reform until before World War II, or around the 1930s.
2. Period 2 (electric lamp era): This period begins after World War II and lasts until the 1970s.
3. Period 3 (electric Talung era with international music or the era of competition and theater performances): This period starts from the 1970s to around 1983.
4. Period 4 (music - shadowless Nora film era or the era of collecting, searching, and establishing associations): This period begins from 1983 onwards.

Nora performances have been presented through mass media and social media, adapting and changing according to the times and society. This art form is an integral part of popular culture both within and outside the southern region of Thailand (Burarat, 2010, pp. 205-201).

### **The second aspect: Inclusive**

Nora is a performing art form that has been recognized as a representation of the social dynamics in Southern Thailand. Consequently, Nora has been incorporated into the education system at various levels, including community, school, and university levels. At the community level, groups have been established to transmit Nora knowledge to the youth, fostering basic skills and a sense of pride in their cultural heritage. At the school level, Nora performance skills are promoted, enabling students to form ensembles and learn from the traditional methods of Nora masters and their lineages. At the university level, the focus is on building knowledge, creating models, and disseminating various forms of Nora, as well as fostering creativity and generating value for Nora at both national and international levels.

### **The third aspect: Representative**

Nora is a performing art that encompasses both art and science. It serves to create aesthetics through performance, music, and other elements, such as costumes and stage settings, providing entertainment, enjoyment, and reflecting society through its performances. Moreover, Nora conveys ideas and teachings passed down through generations, as well as customs, traditions, and beliefs of the community, enabling people to live together under the same set of standards. Examples include showing respect to ancestors through the Nora



Rong Khru ceremony, honoring teachers through the Krob Kru ritual, and promoting good deeds. Those who misbehave are believed to face punishment from deceased ancestors. Therefore, Nora represents the Southern Thai community and the country as a whole, effectively reflecting the way of life of its people.

#### **The fourth aspect: Community-based**

Nora is a performing art that is widely recognized as a reflection of the unique identity of the Southern Thai community and the country as a whole. It is characterized by its beauty, strength, and resilience, and has long been intertwined with the lives of people in the region. Nora has demonstrated adaptability and evolution alongside changes in the social context, and has been conserved and promoted by both public and private sectors. Educational institutions offer courses on Nora performance, and various groups, such as youth ensembles and professional Nora artist collectives, have been established to further nurture and preserve this valuable art form.

#### **Conclusion**

In a rapidly changing world, Nora remains an important aspect of Southern Thai culture, deeply rooted in the local communities of the region. It is a part of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity that continues to evolve and adapt to societal changes, while preserving its traditional elements. The saying “know how to use the old and adopt the new” aptly describes the adaptation of Nora to align with the values of people in different eras (Burarat, 2010). Nora continues to hold value for society (Samansuk & Andhivarothai, 2016), providing performers with physical strength, concentration, noble intentions, aesthetics, ethics, and artistic and literary values. From the past to the present, Nora has served to reflect societal dynamics and act as a representative of Southern Thai communities.

In 2023, Nora was inscribed on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, raising awareness and promoting Thailand's intellectual heritage. This recognition has sparked a renewed sense of pride and appreciation for the local cultural heritage among the people. Nora has garnered increased attention and discussion across various dimensions, including the conservation, promotion, and support of Nora performances, the development of cultural capital to generate added value for the community, and its presentation through various media. While Nora has become a globally recognized cultural heritage, drawing greater interest from society, it still retains its original roles in providing entertainment, instilling beliefs and rituals, reflecting societal dynamics, and transmitting knowledge, ideas, beliefs, and faith from generation to generation.

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