



A Narrative Study of Professional Artistry in Selected Thai Music Teachers

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Abstract

The research question of the study is, ¿How is music teachers' professional artistry in Thai society polished and expressed? There are three objectives: 1) to study music teachers' professional artistry in Thai society by observing the teaching and learning process and relationship between teachers and students, 2) to study the relationship of music teachers' professional artistry, teachers' identification, and teachers' experience.

The Narrative Approach was employed to explore the three stories of three music teachers; Prof. Poonpit Amatayakul, Dussadee Buntasnakul, and Assoc. Prof. Pichit Chaisalee. Semi-structured interview, nonparticipant/participant observation and document review were employed for collecting research data.

The research result found that family, music teachers, friends, and musical experience are important elements influencing music and teacher identification. Professional artistry as a music teacher was developed by teaching experience. Music and teacher identity are the basis of professional artistry. All participants used 4 dimensions of professional artistry; the art of teaching, problem-solving, communicating, and living. They expressed the professional artistry by employing oral tradition approach, developing artistic creativity, focusing on individual differences, developing and keeping faith, and teaching social skills

Key words: Professional artistry, Music teacher training, Thai music teacher, Narrative approach

Introduction

“Professionalism” classifies professional worker's ability from amateur. The differences between professional and unprofessional involve the degree of autonomy and freedom of decision-making in their specific work (Froehlich, 2007). A professional music teacher may need to encounter such complex problems as ethnic and language diversity, children with special needs, one-part family, or academic

expectation. The teacher, therefore, needs to be highly intellectual ability. (Fullan, 2007).

Music teachers need professional knowledge taught in a university such as music theory, music psychology, and educational evaluation and assessment which are essential for the music teachers' roles (Cutietta, 2007). However, in practice, music classroom situation is different from theories (Schon, 1987). Music teachers may have to face and address

students' individual problems and differences, for instance individual behaviors, interests, discipline, as well as bodily structure (Dolloff, 1999). They have what makes a good teacher, self-understanding, and efficient music classroom management (Reimer, 2003). Apart from professional knowledge, the other important part of professionalism is professional artistry. Schon (1987) discusses that the professional artistry is the reflection of the problems which appear in different contexts in the forms of reflection-in-action and knowledge-in-action. The performance of the professional artistry is unique, uncertain, or perhaps contrary to the professional standard. Professionals would perform professional artistry in certain situations in response to problems in their work.

The previous research emphasized teaching professional artistry to artists (Brown, 2000; Carter, 2008; Dees, 2000; Eugeion, 2004; Johnson, 1998; Seneviratne, Schon, 1983 & Schon, 1987). However, teaching professional artistry to music teachers, particularly in Thai context, has not been studied yet. Therefore, the main objectives of the present study are to investigate how the professional artistry is performed by music teachers and what are essentials for developing the professional artistry.

Methodology

A narrative approach was employed to explore the participants' stories. The stories were analyzed according to the phenomenological concept which the meaning of experience is emphasized (Manen, 2003). The participants were selected following the concept of *Theory or Concept Sampling* (Creswell, 2004). The three participants were selected: Professor Dr. Poonpit Amatayakul, Ms. Dussadee Bunyathasanakul, and Associate Professor Pichit Chaisaree. Their stories were presented by narrative writing with the content of participants' life experience, life changing, feeling, and thought (Squire, 2009).

The participants teach different areas of music. Poonpit teaches musicology in a university, Dussadee

classical singing in a private studio, and Pichit Thai classical music in his own home school. They were highly regarded as a great music scholar, musician, and music teacher. All participants are music teachers who have taught for more than 30 years. Most of their students are successful as musicians, music scholars, and music teachers.

The research data was collected by semi-structured interview, and participant and non-participant observation from June to November 2012. After organizing the research data, plots (action, problem, and resolution) settings, characters, and themes were analyzed (Creswell, 2008). Then I wrote their stories and they were edited by the participants.

The Stories

Poonpit

I met Poonpit, 72 years old, when I was a master degree student in the Department of Musicology, College of Music, Mahidol University, Thailand in 2009. He is a professor teaching Advance Musicology Seminar to Ph.D. students. Prior to that, I recognized him as a well-known music scholar who had an academic position as "Professor" in the college. He has published many books and more than 1,000 articles concerning Thai music history, classical music, and music-related areas. In that year, I had a chance to sit in his class. I saw his teaching approach in a semester until I became a doctoral student and took some courses with him.

Poonpit was born and raised by Her Royal Highness Princess Hemvadi (1892-1972), a daughter of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V). Her leisure activities were listening to Thai and western classical music from records and radio and collecting music books. Apart from allowing Poonpit to listen to music and read those books, she also gave music background information about those pieces of music such as composers, artists, literature related to songs or operas, as well as functions of music all of which broadened his knowledge about music history and

aroused his interest in music. In response to his curiosity about music, he always searches for new knowledge. He said, *“When I have a question, I would always search for an answer. I read books and have a conversation with knowledgeable ones. I jot it down in my diary. Sometimes, if the question has not been answered, I will write it in the diary, and try to answer it the question when I have enough information.”*

Not only a full-time medical doctor he was, but Poonpit was also a music scholar. His hobbies, which are a radio program director and a newspaper columnist, made him search for information. For example, when he became a program director he had to research into background information presented in his program by reading and interview extensively. Furthermore, he recorded Thai classical songs which were performed by prominent musicians to present in his radio program. After running the radio program, he was invited to be a music columnist for a weekly newspaper *Matichon*. He wrote articles on Thai music historical and music critical issues. He realized that both of the radio program and the articles would be criticized by audiences and scholars. Therefore he had to do a careful study and be open-minded toward criticism and adjustment if there was more reliable information or evidence.

In terms of teaching career, he had never thought that he would become a music teacher. Until 1981, Poonpit was invited by the president of Mahidol University to establish a program in Ethnomusicology for the Center of Language and Culture for Southeast Asian Studies (presently Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia). Then he became a lecturer and taught graduate students courses such as Thai Musicology, Thai Music History, Southeast Asian Music, World Music, and so on.

Poonpit teaches his students to do academic work in the same way as he does. His standard of academic work became the criteria for assessing and evaluating his students' work. He accentuated, *“The students under my supervision and I have to work to-*

gether in all processes when doing research. All of my students' work had to be reliable with complete content. I read and edit all my students' writing myself to ensure its coherent thoughts.”

Dussadee

The first time I met Dussadee when I auditioned for a bass singer in Suanplu Chorus, one of the most famous choirs in Thailand, where she is a choir director and voice coach. After passing the audition, I learnt to sing with her for three years as a member of the choir. I observed her teaching when she taught different students, both of private and group. In addition, I had chances to talk with her about herself, teaching concept, musician life, and family.

Dussadee was born in a politician's family, the fifth daughter of six children. Her father, Pridi Banomyong was a former Prime Minister and Senior Statesman of Thailand. She expressed, *“My parents were my role model. I am proud to be their daughter.”*

Her mother loved listening to music, playing piano and singing. She explained, *“I remembered that my mom liked to sing and play “Home Sweet Home. She liked to listen to operas and instrumental music from the records”*. All children in the family had to learn to play a musical instrument. Dussadee took piano class seriously with her piano teacher. She was an old nun who was very strict in the eyes of the students. However, Dussadee was lazy to practice, so she could not play in the piano class. She told, *“I was beaten at my fingers when I could not play.”* At home, her mother tried so hard to make her practice her piano lessons, but she could do it for a short while, then paid attention to other activities instead.

A music genre which Dussadee really loves is vocal music. *“I felt happy when I heard vocal songs from the record that my mom turned on. I did not know how to sing, but I tried to copy that sound.”* In that period, there were very few classical vocal teachers in Thailand. However, she had a chance to learn in a very short period with a European baritone teacher in

Bangkok.

Because of political situation, Dussadee's family left for France and China. In China, she attended Beijing Central Conservatory of Music to do a degree in classical voice. When she chose the music major, she did not think about her career opportunity in the future. She told, *"In China, I decided to learn music, classical voice, because I love to sing."*

In the conservatory, Dussadee learnt to sing from a beginning to advanced level with three vocal teachers who had different teaching styles. However, it seemed that regular classes at school were not enough for her. She admitted, *"I was not good at school. Other Chinese friends in my class were able to sing better than I was. So I had to learn and practice more than others by myself."*

After earning her master degree, Dussadee came back to Bangkok. She reasoned, "there was no opera company or a job for classical singer at that time. It was hard to make a living as a singer." She had to work as a secretary, a Chinese part-time teacher, and an insurance agency. However, she had chances to perform in special concerts for example performing with an orchestra, and in a musical. Dussadee had never imagined herself as a vocal teacher. She studied music because she loved to sing and wanted to be a singer. She narrated, *"Once after the TV show which I sang broadcast, there was a girl calling me and asking me to teach her to sing."* That girl became the first student of hers. *"I did not know how to teach, but I know from my experience how to sing, how to improve voice, and how to solve problems."*

Dussadee emphasizes the importance of students' individual differences. Each student has different background, experience, and bodily structure. Those factors influence each student's different voice, interpretation, and performance. She explained, *"I need my students to sing naturally, but sometimes they could not interpret the meaning of the song because they are inexperienced."* Dussadee always tells the story of the song which students are learning. That

helps students interpret the song better. However, Dussadee encourages her students to interpret the song by themselves from their own experience. She asks her students, *"What character you are?"*, *"What is the actor doing?"*, *"Where is the actor?"*, *"How about atmosphere in the song?"*, or *"What do you think about actor?"*

Dussadee treats her students with the concept of Dharma. She always says, *"A teacher must be a good supporter, and devote time and attention to teaching and planning lessons."* She mentioned that she was taught this principle by her family. She hopes her students who will become music teachers in the future will do the same way as she does.

Pichit

Pichit is widely known as a Thai classical musician and scholar. I heard his name as a music scholar who analyzed a structure of Thai classical music. I had chances to talk with him about Thai classical music, life and others.

Pichit was born in a Chinese merchant family. His grandfather immigrated to Siam during the reign of King Rama VI. His parents tried to establish a wealthy family and support their children's education, hoping that they would have good occupations or help run their family business in the future. They were not interested in music, and neither were their children. Pichit expressed, *"I had never been interested in music. I did not know any musical instrument. I have no idea about music."*

Pichit was introduced to music first time when in high school. His school is a catholic school in Bangkok. Every year the school organized a certificate presentation ceremony which was very important for students and parents. There were students' performances including "Khon" or Thai masked dance with Thai music accompaniment. As a result, the school had to set up a band, and Pichit was chosen to be trained in the band, despite lack of interest in music.

At the beginning Pichit felt unhappy because he was forced to join the band. He complained, *"I did not know anything about music. Normally, I would go home immediately after school, but I had to practice in the evening. I felt unhappy."* Pichit had to study Thai instruments with a Thai music teacher, Kru Mi. He used a traditional approach, an oral tradition, to transmit music knowledge. After Pichit chose and tried to learn some Thai music instruments, he did not like those instruments for some reasons. Until he tried to play *"Kong Wong Yai"*, an instrument consisting of tuned gongs set in a circular frame, he was fascinated by its sound. He told, *"When a mallet hit a gong the first time and its sound echoed in my head, I lost myself in a reverie. It brought me to another world. I could not forget that sound all night. I could not wait until the next day to hear that sound again."* This marked the beginning of his music life.

Pichit studied Thai classical music continually and seriously. However, he had never expected to be a Thai music teacher. He said, *"I could not imagine how I could be a good teacher as my music teachers were."*

Once Kru Mi asked Pichit to substitute for himself, he told Kru Mi, *"I cannot teach, I have never attended the Krob Kru ceremony before (a ceremony performed by a venerated artist of admission to the art)."* Kru Mi replied, *"You can. If anybody asks, just tell them, I have allowed you to."* That was the first time Pichit taught music to students. He did not know how to teach, but he used his experience accumulated from his teacher to teach, employing the same teaching approach, knowledge, concepts, and beliefs. Pichit uses an oral tradition to teach students. He claimed, *"This is the best way to teach Thai classical music. Students must imitate the way the teacher plays. No question. No doubt. Just copy."* However, Pichit is well aware that the ultimate goal of Thai classical music studies is that a student should be able to create their own variation based on the melodic line. He emphasized, *"A student needs adequate Thai*

music knowledge. It takes a long time to accumulate until a student understands forms and methods that a master uses for creating his/her own variation."

Still, Pichit also uses a different method to give explanation and analysis of Thai classical music forms and structures to his students. He explains how Thai songs are created which helps students memorize long and complex structured songs.

Results and Discussion

Basic Elements of Professional Artistry

From the stories, the four basic elements of teachers' professional artistry were found; art of teaching, problem-solving, communicating, and living.

Art of teaching

Teachers have to choose appropriate methods when teaching each student. They have to know students' nature, backgrounds, and individual differences. On the one hand, body of knowledge and skills that students need can be taught and explained. On the other hand professional ethics and artistry which teachers need to transmit cannot only be taught by explanation. Therefore they have to find various appropriate approaches to teach their students.

Art of problem-solving

In teaching and learning process, problems are uncertain and unpredictable. The problems vary according to different contexts such as students' individual backgrounds, subject contents, objectives, and environments. The teachers have to analyze immediately those problems and solve them. Some problems can be solved at that moment, but in some situation it takes time to ponder the problems. Sometimes the teachers can not use knowledge or approach that they learnt from a university to solve the complex problems. They have to find particular approaches for solving problems. Experience is the key to decision making and problem-solving.

Art of communication

Teacher's knowledge, ideas, social skills, and

life style are transmitted to students. Teacher had to know how to communicate what they want to teach. Furthermore, communication is essential for developing the relationship between teachers and students and, therefore, educational success.

Art of living

The teacher is the role model for students who, in the future, may be musicians, music teachers, and music scholars. In other words, students would learn the professional identity through observation and absorption. Students' faith in their teacher is also developed from observing their teacher's life. The teacher had to be aware he or she is an important model. The teacher's identity does not refer only to teacher's knowledge, but his or her life as well.

Professional Artistry: Teacher's Response

All above four arts related to professional artistry are used in response to their students' problems and developing students' skills, worldviews, and identities to meet the objectives of music learning. In this research, 5 actions which are the participants' professional artistry were explored;

Employing Oral Tradition Approach

Oral tradition is an approach used by the teachers in question. Although there are various teaching approaches in the modern educational system, oral tradition, used for transmitting knowledge in Thai culture for a long time, is still useful and suitable for music teaching and learning in Thai context. Such music knowledge as practice, context, function, history, and professional artistry is directly transmitted from a teacher (master) to a student.

Poonpit transfers body of knowledge to his students because he understands that the Thai educational culture uses the oral tradition approach for transmitting knowledge. Therefore, his students have to imitate his method and process of academic work. Pichit learnt Thai classical music in a traditional way - an oral tradition. When becoming a music teacher, he uses it as his main teaching method. He plays an ex-

cerpt of melody repeatedly, and then students imitate it until they can exactly play like a teacher did. Also, the oral tradition approach takes part in Dussadee's teaching process - imitating voice style and interpreting meaning of music.

Developing artistic creativity

Artistic creativity is a skill which teachers hope students have. Students' artistic creativity is motivated by critiques, questioning, and giving chances to present his/her ideas. Teachers will choose suitable approaches based on the context, students' backgrounds and teaching aims.

Dussadee's important teaching aim is to support her students to develop their art works - vocal performance - by themselves. Dussadee considers that her students have different backgrounds and experiences that influence students to create or interpret meanings of songs in different ways. Firstly, Dussadee gives examples of song interpretation to her students, and then explains how to interpret, communicate, and perform appropriately. Later, on her advice, she gives students the freedom to interpret the meaning of the song based on their own background and experience. Poonpit develops students' creativity by giving constructive criticism of their academic works. He employs standard of his own academic work as criteria for evaluating students' works. Then, he suggests what information students need to add in their work to make it more reliable and academically recognized. Students must learn a correct and suitable methodology, and use it as a tool for developing their interested work. Although Pichit needs students to imitate all his knowledge, his ultimate teaching aim is that students should create their own variation based on Thai classical music methods. Pichit has the concept that students have to be equipped with enough Thai music knowledge, that is, melody, rhythm, pattern, and melodic connection in order to understand specific forms of Thai classical music before creating their own variation. Individual students do not spend the same

amount of time to acquire knowledge. Unfortunately, some students cannot achieve the aim.

Focusing on individual differences

Focusing on the student's individual difference is teachers' reaction to problems in the process of knowledge transmission. Teachers are aware that different learning problems are caused by individual differences - physical appearance, thoughts, skills, and backgrounds. This reaction shows that teachers pay careful attention to details of students' problems, and try to address problems based on the individual differences.

Dussadee discusses that each student is different in terms of voice, interpretation, and performance depending on individual differences. Voice teachers should solve problems on the difference by suitable approach.

Pichit states that he has to understand students' individual differences, and then he determines the way of teaching. He chooses musical instruments and songs for his students appropriately by considering their different characters. In addition, he carefully chooses a promising talented student of moral character to learn a higher level song.

Poonpit points out that each student has different interests and background knowledge. He will suggest what research topic the student should study and consider the feasibility according to each student's research interests and background knowledge and focuses on his or her potential to conduct research - developing the topic, collecting data, analyzing data, and so on.

Developing and Keeping Faith

The faith is students' strong inner feeling, trust or confidence in their music teachers' behaviors which they act through their teaching, problem-solving, communicating, and living. Because the participants are aware that their behaviors may influence the student's faith in their teachers, the teachers should be on their best behavior such as being knowledgeable, self-developing, behaving themselves, supporting students,

whether consciously or not. The aforementioned teacher's positive behaviors are resulted from teacher identity - self-understanding as teacher.

Because the respect for teacher is the Thai social norm, the faith is an essential of music teaching, both of performance and academic. Thai classical music teacher is a master who holds knowledge and transmits it to the next generation directly. So if students have lost faith - suspecting a teacher's knowledge, they cannot achieve the goal.

Poonpit's students have faith in him when they see him to work seriously and continually forewords the music academic. At the same time, Poonpit is aware that he is a role model for his students, so he has to behave in an appropriate way both in working and living such as doing academic works with reliable process, teaching students with actual content, developing himself, and helping students to solve personal problems.

Dusdee's students have faith in her because they see that their teacher is a role model as a great music teacher and singer. Dussadee is aware that she is music teacher and has to live appropriately as music teacher.

In his outlook, Pichit see that faith in an essential of Thai classical music study. He has faith highly in his teacher, both of visible and invisible teachers. He often praise and worship his teachers. His students have faith in him (Pichit) when they see him to transmit a long difficult song accurately and act as a great teacher such as not grudging teaching knowledge, teaching beneficial and appropriate knowledge, and so on.

The teachers experienced feelings faith with their teacher and people around them. They are aware that the faith is an important factor which influences the development of the relationship between a teacher and students together.

Teaching social skills

Social skill teaching is the teachers' action for solving students' behavioral problems concerning

their role of a musician, a music scholar, and a music teacher. The teachers are aware that workers in musical professions are different from others in the society, so they (students) need to adapt themselves to the social context. The teachers' social skill teaching reflects that they not only teach music knowledge or skills, but emphasize the importance of context and society also. They teach social skills when they observe that the content or conservation concerns the society such as collecting data from sensitive participants, performing with other bands, and so on. Sometimes they teach social skills when they observe that their students have negative thoughts that may influence their life.

The importance of music scholar living is recognized by Poonpit. He often emphasizes that music scholar should carefully work, especially the research data are collected from sensitive participant such as Thai musicians or masters from different school and presented in the public. In addition, Poonpit emphasizes the importance of teacher roles in the society because almost all students will become teacher after finishing a PhD.

Dussadee usually teaches about life in the society to students, especially the role of music teacher and citizen. She uses the principle of Dharma - Buddha's teachings - and her experience to be content for teaching.

Social skills also are the important issue which Pichit teaches his students because he understands that the relationship between musicians and others is complex and sensitive. For example, musicians should be aware that some songs should be performed in some opportunities. He teaches his students concerning culture issues and social norms must be acted meticulously for preventing conflict.

Factors Affecting Professional Artistry

From the teachers' stories, the factors - experiences and identities - affecting professional artistry are found. The experiences and identities result from

each teacher's context; family, parents, peers, music teachers, music activities and music events. The different context is a cause of teachers' different experience and world view, and influence teachers' identification as musician, music scholar, and music teacher.

Experiences

Music experience

Music experience such as playing music instrument, singing, being a radio program director, or writing a music article are the experience which participants desired to do when they have a chance. The music experience is the important factor which helps the participants to understand their picture as musician clearly.

Teaching experience

Teaching experience is the most important factor influencing the development of professional artistry. During the time of teaching, teacher identity is developed. The teachers' teaching experience results from employing their music knowledge and feeling on a musician or a music teacher developed from the internal and external educational system in their teaching. The participants understand teaching approaches relating with other methods such as the development of the good relationship between teachers and students and the problem-solving. The participants did not graduate in music education, but they were developed as teacher by accumulating music experience and skill when they were a student, a musician, a music scholar, and a music teacher.

Identities

The Participants' identities - personal identity, music identity, teacher identity, are the important factors that influence the development and action of participants' professional artistry. Those identities perform different functions in their professional artistry. Personal identity in this case is personal behavior which was influenced by his/her context. Personal behavior influences the behavior of musician and

music scholar which is base for self-development. Furthermore, the behavior affects participants' ability to solve problems and develop a good relationship between participants (teacher) and their students.

Musical identity is the essential element of music teaching. It includes the musical knowledge and the self-understanding which are used as contents for teaching.

Participants' music identity and (music) teacher identity are established in a long period of time when they studied with their teachers. They experienced a feeling of being musician and music teacher from their music teacher and music environment. The participants' music experiences made them to have self-understanding or identities as musician or music teacher obviously.

Conclusions

Teachers' identities influence their professional artistry. The identities - personal identity, teacher identity, musician identity, and music scholar identity - were established from the teachers' experience in different context. Professional artistry is an important part of professional identity because teacher students who will become an inservice teacher have to encounter various educational problems, both of in content and context. Therefore, they have to use an appropriate approach for solving those problems.

For this research, the actions and the essentials of teachers' professional artistry were explored. On the one hand the research results - employing oral tradition approach and developing artistic creativity

- accords with Shone's study, on the other hand the research results - focusing on individual differences, developing and keeping faith, and teaching social skills - are the professional artistry which the Thai teachers act.

Although the professional artistry is personal ability, it can be developed by educational process. The research process can be adapted to be educational process; 1) to study a model teacher for developing and being aware identities, 2) to develop lesson plan for teaching demonstrate class, and 3) to re-develop for improving the lesson plan and re-teaching. After finishing each process, students have to discuss and reflect their self about the experience they encounter. They should be aware that professional artistry is important. They have to know about the essential and developing process of professional artistry. And they have to know that what is their own identity and professional artistry by narrating, presenting and discussing.

Recommendations

From this research, the issues concerning the knowledge of professional artistry should be studied and developed obviously. For example, a researcher may study about professional artistry in a specific area of music teacher such as studying in a Thai string music teacher, a Pi-phat music teacher, a piano music teacher, and so on. In addition, a researcher should conduct an experimental research for developing a curriculum which improves the professional artistry for music teacher.

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