

**TEMPLE AND ITS ROLE IN SUSTAINING THE IDENTITY OF THE SIAMESE  
COMMUNITY IN PERLIS, MALAYSIA**

Chayuti Tassanawongwara<sup>1</sup>, Hanafi Hussin<sup>1,2</sup>, & Tepika Rodsakan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

<sup>2</sup>Universiti Malaya Cultural and Heritage Research Centre

Universiti Malaya

50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

<sup>3</sup>Department of Thai and Asian Music, Faculty of Fine Arts

Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok Thailand

(tasanawara@gmail.com, hanafih@um.edu.my, tepikajoy@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

Siamese in northern Malaysia in the post-colonial era is set up and learned in mainly two ways on the areas where Siamese residing is an issue of a dispute between the land either used to be occupied by Siam as a Siamese protectorate of Malaya, or being a part of Malaysian peninsular. The paper examines Buddhist temples' role in Perlis and *Klong Yao*, a music tradition, between religious and profane performances. The study applied a qualitative research approach, gathering data through field research methods such as observation, participant observation, and interviews. The study revealed that *Klong Yao* was positioned in Perlis as a part of the music serving at temple events. Presently, the Siamese are ultimately successful in revealing an image of performing identity and establishing a Siamese uniqueness through the aid of Buddhist temples. Monks and Siamese uphold the values of tradition. Additionally, the timeline of *Klong Yao*'s performance in Perlis shows that *Klong Yao* is dedicated to serving religious events and is sustained by the temple. Sacred and profane gab has been seamlessly merged through *Klong Yao* performance.

**Keywords:** *temple, profane, Klong Yao, Siam, identity*

## INTRODUCTION

Siamese and Thai are the words used to link people of the same race to different countries. The challenges of identifying Thai as well as Siamese have emerged to claim who were born to be called Siamese or Thai. In the historical timeline, Siamese in northern Malaysia, especially in the state of Perlis is learned about people of land separation. The issue is disputed in mainly two major matters. They include race and land; firstly, the Siamese have been conscious that they are the descendants of the Siamese and Thai bloodline. Secondly, the land they have been residing in used to be previously occupied by Siam. Afterwards, in 1957, the four northern states were seized under Malaysia, and they are still under Malaysia. The Siamese remain the reality of the past, which is accepted as the Siamese live within the coterminous boundaries of Thailand and Malaysia. However, the borderlines are mapped to classify land into two countries, as they were taken place under colonial policy left in many Southeast Asian places. Land separation then makes the clearer aspects of nation and state, which directly causes people who were the same racial family to break off relations by invisible state line of frontiers.

The effects of Siamese in northern Malaysia were attacked by post-land separation. They became a double minority among major minorities and majorities in the multiracial country. Dating back to the past, when the Siamese and Melayu people shared the areas that were not politically settled, the land boundaries. The situation of the states was once the Siam's land, namely Kelantan, Perak, Perlis, and Kedah, where were not entirely controlled under Siam as Winichakul (1994) discussed that there is some evidence to show the Raja of Kedah survived to maintain balancing the power of ruler by switching role. Whenever conflicts arise among the Dutch, the Kedah needs Siam's assistance. They offered tributaries such as silver and golden trees as customs of the protectorate. The situation represented the power of Siam over the four states; the location position of the four states comes with identifying the condition of people, for instance, when Siamese Thai mentioned the four states—they called the states of southern Siam while when Siamese Malaysian mentioned—they called the states of northern Malaysia. The four states mentioned have been officially proclaimed as parts of mainland Malaysia; however, the Siamese who became land owners are diasporic people who still question who they are.

With the right to Malaysian citizenship, Siamese people are considered first-class citizens in Malaysia (known as Bumiputera). Even though the Siamese are claimed to be Bumiputera, they are known among others as *Orang Siam*. The term calls them also differentiates them from the majority, Melayu, and defines them as a diasporic minority (Kaeosanit, 2016, p.139). In terms of different conditions, i.e., race, language, religion, and custom (Bundirek, 2010, pp.7-8). Religion is the main issue, which indicates that the Siamese represent Buddhists. Likely in the Buddhist practice in

Thailand, the Siamese inevitably do not hide their religious identity. To maintain their religion, the Siamese perform in numerous ways, namely Thai identity performance, ritual performance, religious performance, and so on. A cultural practice in this study emphasises temple roles in terms of the contribution of sacred parts and also focuses on exchanging cultural traditions between Siamese and Thai on crossing border lines of nations. Additionally, the profane events performed by the Siamese are the main basis for making identity. Temples as religious places are properties of the Siamese community and tend to enact taking back benefits to the community as well. This paper, the term 'performance' covers religious and profane sharing spaces in events, language in the use of Siamese, and rituals and music performances. Temples became the centre of the Siamese community and enhanced and maintained Siamese-ness among Siamese as a minority.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A small number of people who hold *Bumipetera* Malaysian citizenship are the Siamese, despite its minority status. The principal practices of Buddhism and the Thai language emphasise the unique characteristics of the Siamese, differentiating them from the majority and other minority groups. Temples and the music known as *Klong Yao* worked together to promote the expression of Siamese-ness in the perceptions of Siamese and others. The research was structured around a qualitative approach, employing the ethnographic method to achieve the research objectives. Various collection methods were utilised for the study, including observation, interview, and participant observation. Furthermore, temples and Siamese communities in Perlis were captured and examined as areas for research. An analysis of cultural practises and interactions between Siamese temples, the function of religious events, and music uses is also included. This paper examines the identity formation and temple affiliation in Perlis, Wat Macchimaprasit, Wat Thungtong, and Wat Kubang Tiga, as determined by data collected during the Tod Krathin religious ritual. Significant aspects of the Temple's role in sustaining the Siamese identity of the state of Perlis are also addressed in the paper.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Siamese and Siamese Community in Perlis**

In contemporary discourse, ethnicity is perceived as both a means by which individuals establish their sense of self and a form of social stratification resulting from forming groups according to individuals' actual or perceived ancestry. In relation to variations, ethnicity may denote the differentiation that encompasses both inclusive and exclusive conduct, as in the classification of individuals into "us" and "them" (Gregory, Johnston,

Pratt, Watts, & Whatmore, 2009, pp.214 - 215). Additionally, a combination of shared values, beliefs, norms, preferences, behaviours, experiences, consciousness of kind, recollections, and allegiances comprise ethnicity. Ethnicity is utilised to convey one's self-perception. Likewise cultural criteria are used to differentiate ethnicity from outside the group as well as within it so that the characteristics are precisely defined in accordance with the identified ethnic groups. Moreover, ethnicity and its constituent elements are temporally and spatially relative, and, similar to other social phenomena, they are fluid and susceptible to modification (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007, p.75-76, 180-181). A complex and variable relationship exists between culture and ethnicity. While ethnicity does not exist within groups, it signifies non-belonging to those groups; it is merely a relational characteristic. Ethnicity refers to the persistent and methodical exchange of cultural distinctions among groups that regard themselves as unique. It manifests itself wherever social interaction renders cultural differences significant; therefore, it should be examined at the social life level rather than the symbolic culture level. Furthermore, ethnicity is situational and relational: the ethnic nature of a social encounter is variable. To put it differently, it is not unconditional (Eriksen, 2010, pp.68-69).

From a historical perspective, the Chinese were cognizant of and referred Siam. Numerous scholarly investigations into the history of Thailand inevitably commenced with the Sukhothai era, albeit with the specific objective of identifying Thai-ness (Hall, 1981, p. 180). Despite the Thai people having existed as a distinct ethnic group for millennia prior to the advent of Christianity, it was not until 1238 that the Sukhothai Kingdom was founded in the region that is now Thailand. The incursion of the Thais was a factor in the Sri Vijayan Empire's decline. In 1292, Rama Khamheng, a Sukhothai monarch, defeated his neighbours and extended his dominion southward, from the Menam Valley in Thailand to the Sri Vijayan ports in the southern portion of the Malay Peninsula (Hall, 1968, p. 63).

Thai traditions are focused on areas of parts of Thailand; the concept of Thailand includes four parts: northern Thailand, northeastern Thailand, central Thailand, and southern Thailand, which have been set up since the colonial era. After Thailand was politically mapped as the Kingdom of Thailand, Thai people from each part were grouped as one Thai. On the other hand, they practically are separated into people of parts of the nation by many factors such as language speaking, way of eating, religious cults, and so on. The uniqueness of Thai tradition is also separated following likely the nation parts. It means performance cultural areas are indicated by state boundary concepts including visual arts, performing arts, music, and crafts. To link to the Siamese, as mentioned, they are close to southern Thai culture. From the Thai-centric view, Montesano & Jory (2008) show that the northern Malaysian states had been incorporated into a Siamese tributary system in the thirteenth century after Melaka's prosperity—the northern states were under the influential power of both Siam and

Melayu. In a study of ethnic relations, the people in Kelantan reveal that the origins of the Kelantan Thai are obscure (Winzeler, 1985, pp. 67-68). Wyatt (2014) looked at the identity of Thai and its meaning. He focused on language and culture, but identity refers to people's practices in what they speak and do.

Siamese can be called either Thai or *Orang Siam*. People other than Siamese tend to define Siamese as Buddhist and Thai-speaking. The recognition of stereotyping of Siamese is often perceived, i.e., behaviour and activities. Furthermore, the Siamese is also known as an invisible minority; according to Johnson (2004), the boundary zones of Anglo-Siamese in colonial histories have vanished even with the existence of Buddhist villages or constant traffic of people. The Siamese missed official mentions because the desire of powerful British colonisation hoped to maintain a Malay and Muslim political-cultural environment and conceal Siamese and Buddhist social. Among various races, including Chinese, Indian, and mostly Malaysian, the Siamese are understood as the majority-minority. They have to connect to people with the same identity, and Thais are a large group of people. The Siamese is possibly tied to the feeling of being relative and the perception of a sense of Thai. Ryoko (2005) talked about tools of communication in daily life. Language is a tool to communicate and implicitly characterise people who speak the language and the others separately. Particularly, in Muslim and Buddhist sharing states, the influence of language is claimed to be the custom of practising. In understanding, languages speaking designate the religious practice of both Muslims and Buddhists. It is to show that when people express language, their religious differences. Wongmai (2015) studied Thai-speaking in Kedah using the southern Thai dialect mixed with Malay words. The acceptance of Thai and Malay customs is to adjust and survive in current living, but it must not strongly cause the Siamese core characteristics in religious and local beliefs.

Therefore, religion affects people through a way of practising and thinking. In the case of the Siamese, the Buddhist faith tends to lead them to a way of Buddhist behaviour in real life performance. The domination of being encircled by Muslims, The Siamese is an enclave and differed from the Muslims in southern Thailand as well as the Muslims in Malaysia. To survive among major diversity, the Siamese have shared some partial sameness of religious belief with the Chinese in terms of religious sphere. As a minority, the Siamese is inevitably viewed by the majority. Ismail (1977) described minorities in Malaysia as different groups. He showed the recognising of self-ness of the Siamese through outsider's views that Siamese were known as subordinate status in social relations and deficiency in terms of the economic system. The Siamese were also looked down on occupational opportunities and ability to access educational systems. It seems that the Siamese were marginalised during the increasing prosperous time of Malay development. The Siamese unavoidably identified their relationship status with the majority as subordinates and rulers, among other ethnic groups as clients and patrons.

After 1957, Malaysia became autonomous from the United Kingdom. The idea of dreaming needs a sense of nation immediately promoted for nation-state building. The 'Malay-ness' has been used in national policy and has been added to the cultural component as a modern structure in the diverse identities of people (Wirunha, 2008, p. 41). The Siamese realised they were a part of Malaysia in the post-colonial era. They have been a small group of people in a multi-ethnic society in the nation. The Siamese were questioning how important they were to Malaysia. The role and status of the Siamese in the Malay Peninsula depend on social changes and political contexts. Although the Siamese status seems to be Bumiputera—a kind of Malaysian first-class citizenship in real life practices), it is not equal to Malays (Narkseetong & Putthichot, 2011). Therefore, the Siamese do not take an important role in leading the economic sector, while the Chinese have played a role. Their contribution role to Malaysia covers the complicated status of the Siamese to the nation; obviously, the Siamese are missing their status as citizens who contribute things to the nation. Rather, the Chinese, as non-Bumiputera, took part in the core contribution as the power of the country's economic system. So, the Siamese must express their sound to tell they are still Malaysian people with a long history. The Siamese identify themselves as Malaysians of Thai descent who continuously adhere to cultural identity. A system of belief and rituals become faiths of hamlet culture. The space of religion, such as Buddhist temples, became where they could fully perform Siamese-ness, including practicing Thai identity. The Buddhist monks are core components of the sacred part of religion in terms of human beings; therefore, the monks were the spiritual centre of the Siamese community (Tipsrinimit, 2012, pp.170-171). The Siamese people accept the same cultural values, mainly on religious or cultural practices. In expressing Siamese-ness, Siamese people extensively strengthen cultural and religious values together. They have been utilising the status of Malaysian citizens and minorities in a social hierarchy gently by refining strategic progression.

Shadow Performance, formerly Wayang Siam, is situated in the southern region of Thailand and the northern state of Malaysia. Wayang Siam is a basis for the development of hybrid music ensembles and music. Rong Ngeng Tanyong is also located in Malaysia's northwest and southwest regions. Over the last four to five decades, the repertoires utilised in Rong Ngeng performances have diminished and entered a state of dormancy. The majority of the performances occur at urban festivals. Formerly, the performances spanned nearly an entire day, from sunset to sunrise. However, performances have become brief in recent times. The research paper that centres on categorising melodies illustrates the comparative distribution of the complete repertoire of twenty-seven melodies, which can be categorised into four distinct groups. Hybridity in texts manifests itself through incorporating Malay loanwords into Thai dialect, thereby illustrating the coexistence of Thai and Malay within a single sentence.

Each sentence signifies Thai-Malay hybridity and generates an awkward translation (Matusky, 1993; Ross, 2011).

The Siamese ethnic group is frequently associated with stereotypical recognition, which pertains to the perception of their behaviour through cultural events, religious rituals, and practises. In addition, northern Malaysian Thai ethnic communities are considered an invisible minority. However, this does not imply that the Siamese are extinct in the territory. They establish a distinct domain for profane and religious expression by cultivating positive interethnic relations and influencing community perceptions (Tassanawongwara & Hussin, 2019). Ritual performance is a balance and connection between the spiritual and material realms. Music-scape and dance-scape generated a desired social, cultural, and ritualistic atmosphere (Hussin & John Baptist, 2019, p. 22). The Siamese exhibited their performing culture and events within temples that were associated with servicing monastic occasions. Monks and temples were instrumental in facilitating the formation of Siamese identity.

### **Communities and Temples in Perlis**

Therefore, the Siamese residing in northern Malaysia have been historically and culturally impacted by the discourse of territorial loss. Thais reside in the four states (Kelantan, Perlis, Kedah, and Terengganu) that are virtually identical to their Thai counterparts in Thailand; they number in the thousands and share the Siamese households' culture, tradition, religious places, and Thai architecture (Aryuwatthana, 1974). Siamese adhere to Buddhism as their primary religion. Wat is a Buddhist co-working space shared by Siamese people and serves as a dwelling and communal area for the Buddhist Monks and people.

Buddhist and Muslim states in southern Thailand employed the Thai term 'Phasa' which translates to 'language' and 'speech' in standard Thai. The designation of the religious practises of both Muslims (Phasa Khaek) and Buddhists (Phasa Thai) is accomplished through language. When Phasa is employed, it signifies the religious distinction in a contrasting manner (Ryoko, 2005). In the northern states of Malaysia, individuals of Thai ancestry continued to uphold a cultural identity derived from a system of rituals and beliefs: faith and devotion to Buddhism, with the Thai monastery serving as the epicentre of hamlet culture. Furthermore, Buddhist monks held a central position in the community's spiritual sphere, demonstrating reverence for sacrosanct matters, fortune-telling, and faith in nature and the supernatural. In daily life, the southern dialect was utilised for communication. The obligatory nature of Buddhist ordination for minors contributed to its preference (Tipsrinimit, 2012, pp. 170-171).

Twenty-three communes comprise the Thai villages in Perlis, but only ten, Kubang Tiga, Belukar Lenga, Guar Musang, Padang Jelutong, Guar Nangka, Jejawi, Utan Aji, Behor Gelam, Banat, and Tengah, are predominantly inhabited by Siamese.

Siamese people not only speak Thai in their daily lives but also speak the Malaysian language. They also pronounce ten villages differently than the official name. Many names originate from southern Thai terms; for instance, Kuan translates to "mountain." Similarly, certain Malaysian words are translated; for instance, Tengah becomes "Klang," which denotes the middle. Typically, the Siamese refer to temples by their Thai term and the names of their localities.

**Table 1: Villages Siamese densely reside called by the Thai language**

Village official name	Siamese name
Kubang Tiga	Kubang Tiga
Belukar Lenga	Kannga
Guar Musang	Kuan Musang
Padang Jelutong	Thungtong
Guar Nangka	Guar Nangka
Jejawi	Jawi
Utan Aji	Tanji
Behor Gelam	Bankoke
Banat	Manat
Tengah	Klang

Perlis is the smallest state in Malaysia, with only six Thai Buddhist temples shared by ten villages. The communities share temples equitably; however, only the Promwicitr temple is inhabited by a Siamese Malaysian abbot, as Thai abbots occupy the remaining temples. The temples are as follows;

1. Promwicitr
2. Macchimaprasit
3. Guar Nanga
4. Suwankhiri
5. Siam Kubang Tiga
6. Thungtong





**Figure 1: A Buddhist monk teaching a tone marks lesson in Thai, at Wat Promwicitr**  
(Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, fieldwork, 2016.)

The temples are religious places in the doctrinal practice of religion, and some temples have also further contributed to communities to encourage and support Thai traits and identity. For example, Wat Promwicitr opens evening classrooms at a time after school and weekend classrooms for Siamese children to learn the Thai language. Speaking Thai is usually used to communicate with families. The reading and writing skills are big burdens; the monks, especially old monks or abbots who have been ordained and lived in monkhood, would be called as 'Por Than' – the word used for paying respected monks. The educated monks who were good at Thai language were mostly ordained in Thailand or Malaysia but spent their primary monkhood period studying Dharma and language in Thailand, particularly in Songkhla province. At Wat Promwicitr, an elderly monk dedicated his experience in the Thai language to teaching his adolescent and teenage students.

Temples are communal spaces for activities regarding temple's events. The night markets during temple's events are a time of community and family. Usually, the

religious rituals take place in the daytime as a sacred period, and the nighttime is for profane activity. Local entertainment such as Nora entertains people day or night, but it is not included in sacred rituals for religion, and Nang Talung performance is always arranged to play at nighttime. Actually, the entertainment, whether Shadow Puppet or concert, has shaped senses of inclusiveness and cultural sharing. At Wat Macchimaprasit, locally known as Wat Jawi, the annual Tod Krathin ceremony takes place after Buddhist Lent and lasts for 2 to 3 days. The Siamese temple committees must prepare the required items, such as the monk robes for the Tod Krathin ritual, while other Siamese people residing around the temple set up tents for night markets. The atmosphere was rigorous, with food and drinks tents.



**Figure 2: A night market at Wat Macchimaprasit**  
(Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, fieldwork, 2016.)

Nang Talung, a shadow puppet, is a performing heritage of northern Malaysia and southern Thailand. It is the emblem of the performance of Siamese and southern Thai people sharing. The troupe is comprised of musicians and puppeteers; for this troupe, the screen is written in Thai, and the show is the troupe's name, Kitti Kacharat. The temple committee members did agree to hire the troupe crossing the

border from Thailand to perform in the temple in Perlis. In this view, the Nang Talung constructed the results of cross-border relations and harmonising two lands but the same race. The Siamese and the southern Thai have been interconnected; performance is a medium to exercise linkages between groups and social practice.



**Figure 3: Nang Talung performance at Wat Macchimaprasit**

(Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, fieldwork, 2016.)

### People's connections and Temple's relations

Based on the accounts of elderly Siamese residing in Perlis, it can be inferred that *Klong Yao* arrived in the region around 60 years ago. From Satun to Kuala Perlis, the former provincial governor of Satun, Thailand, travelled to deliver a substantial amount of Krathin money to the temple. In order to extend a warm greeting to the provincial governor and their brethren from Satun, the villagers of Perlis travelled to Kuala Perlis. The province governor and his staff led the *Klong Yao* ensemble as they marched in the Tod Krathin parade procession. Following the ceremony, the provincial governor presented the Suwankhiri temple with a set of the *Klong Yao* ensemble for the benefit of the public. This *Klong Yao* set established the first *Klong Yao* ensemble in the village of Guar Musang.

The second account of *Klong Yao's* arrival at Wat Macchimaprasit transpired several decades ago. During that time, a monk named *Klom* or Por Tan *Klom*, a Buddhist from Thailand, visited the temple to impart knowledge of the Thai language. Siamese

children from all around the temple were congregated to be instructed by the monk. Furthermore, endeavours were made to convey Thai culture, which led to the selection of *Klong Yao* as the initial embodiment of the musical culture. The monk endeavoured to teach his pupils and served as a pillar in the repeated importation of *Klong Yao* from Thailand. A juvenile man and a Por Tan Klom's *Klong Yao* team member reminisced that the monk effectively assembled a *Klong Yao* ensemble team. Previously uninterested in practising *Klong Yao*, he is now the driving force behind Wat Macchimaprasit's *Klong Yao* ensemble and instructs the young in its preservation. Por Tan Klom was the first instructor to instruct Siamese on *Klong Yao* in Jejawi and is regarded as the one who pioneered its dissemination in the region of Jejawi.

A farmer retold the tale from his youth. Prior to that time, Guar Nangka village did not have any *Klong Yao*, whereas numerous other villages did. He and his companions believed that their village was expected to have a *Klong Yao* ensemble performing religious ceremonies. In pursuit of instruction, he embarked on a journey to Songkhla, Thailand, with eleven companions in search of a *Klong Yao* instructor. The group ascended to the Sangka Rattanaram temple (locally called Wat Thakoi). They encountered a master at the temple and were resolved to receive master's guidance briefly. They went back to their village after purchasing a set of the *Klong Yao* from the master before returning to Guar Nangka so that the third *Klong Yao* arrival in Perlis occurred. Upon purchasing the first set of six *Klong Yao* drums, brought from Songkhla, they were dedicated to the Kampung Guar Nangka temple.

In Perlis, the *Klong Yao* and ceremonies are inextricably linked, particularly in a sacred context. While seeking *Klong Yao*, the Siamese delighted in being around during the first three visits. The items that were entrusted to the care of the temple's clergy later became the temple's property. Despite the prohibition on Buddhist monks accepting items that are not essential for monastic life, such as musical instruments, particularly in Perlis, the monks appear to have no objection to accepting the offer of *Klong Yao* as temple property. The *Klong Yao* have transformed to become entities associated with religions. In Perlis, even a person's *Klong Yao* is stored in the temple instead of the owners' residence. *Klong Yao* is typically utilised within the temple, indicating that it is secure and comfortable. Religious sites are considered suitable for both the performance of *Klong Yao* and the comfort of its participants. Buddhist sanctuaries serve as gathering places for adherents of the faith. *Klong Yao* ensembles are performed during rituals and religious ceremonies. The religious observances pertain to the ceremonial practises of Theravada Buddhism within the Siamese communities, which adopted the Theravada sect from Thailand. The monks of this sect are subject to the authority of the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand. The Buddhist monk models the religious conduct of the Thai monk. Thailand even provided the chief monk in Perlis and northern Malaysia with the official monk designation. Similarly, religious ceremonies, customs, and traditions are closely aligned with those of Thailand.

### **Temples' area of Siamese performing identity**

Applying culture's original functions to developing novel concepts regarding utilising the culture process also incorporates music. When sophisticated music functions are developed, they may influence numerous aspects of the cultural process, including the customs, beliefs, and behaviour of the people in that society. The Siamese community in Perlis has emerged as an overwhelming minority and when performing for the others, the music they choose must distinguish them and demonstrate their unique position in a multicultural society. Utilising *Klong Yao* as music, the Siamese perform at sacrosanct events and develop performances for various characters out of respect. Thai *Klong Yao* initially influenced the *Klong Yao* of Perlis in its fundamental concept, but the Perlis *Klong Yao* is independently created in the performance details to present Thai-ness through Siamese identity as freely as possible. Typically, the Siamese employ the *Klong Yao* for various purposes, especially for serving religious event functions.

#### ***Tod Krathin ceremony***

In addition to communicating with the divine through prayer or invocation, sacred rituals serve to manifest or express religious convictions. Sacredness or sanctity is typically explicated in the Buddhist tradition through the participation of Buddhist monks in monastic affairs or activities likely associated with chanting; incantation is no exception. These events, whether held in monastic locations or to symbolise the place, are planned with religious significance. Performance encompasses sacred and secular elements, although the two are sometimes indistinguishable. Furthermore, the musical performance conveys information through its invisible presentation and its emphasis on action and visible enactment. While the sound can operate as a secular soundscape devoid of religious connotations, it can instantly transform into something sacred when connecting religious rituals to be necessary for even a portion of activities. The *Klong Yao* musical performance serves as the initial or preliminary phase of ceremonies. The *Klong Yao* in Perlis effectively embodies the formal requirements of religious rituals through three symbolic associations with ceremonies: (i) greeting people, (ii) leading people, (iii) entertaining, and (iv) transferring secular to sacred values.





**Figure 4: Perlis boy’s booing *Ho Sam La***  
 (Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, fieldwork, 2016.)

With the very first round of yelling off directed at the boy chosen to do so—“*Ho, he, Ho, he, Ho, he Hoy—hew*—the audience was abruptly alerted to the fact that the part of merit was about to begin. Participants generally carried Krathin trees while standing in line; those carrying yellow robes, however, charged into the parade. The boy continues to yell off *Ho*. Upon concluding *Ho*, every participant responded with a resounding “*hew*,” which implied they were prepared to march in the parade. A third round of *Ho* occurred to reconfirm that everybody was marching in harmony. The *Klong Yao* ensemble, which is a Mhong instrument typically made, continues continuously. As the ensemble began to perform, a part of the audience surrounded it in an impromptu dance prompted by their feelings.

**Notation 1: Yelling off ‘Ho’**  
 (Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, fieldwork, 2017.)



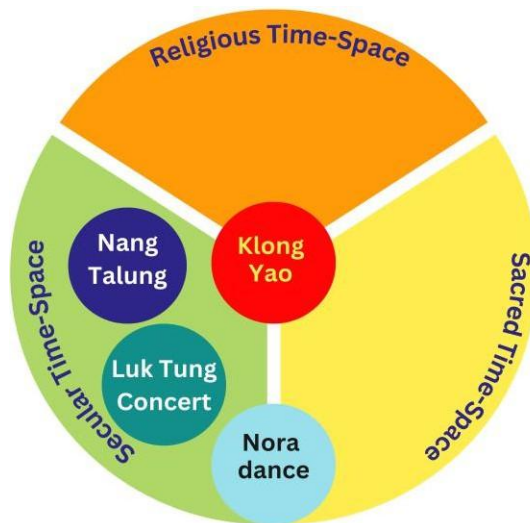
**Figure 5: Procession leading the crowd in *Tod Krathin* ceremony**  
(Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, fieldwork, 2016.)

The fact that religious observance embodies Thai identity renders a basic notion of associating religion and identity insufficient when attempting to define the Siamese *Klong Yao* performance as Buddhist music. However, it is likely a conspicuous introduction demonstrating the Siamese actively enhancing Siamese-ness. Furthermore, the Siamese have established performance processes in profane areas.

In addition to lyrics and melodies, a synthesis of *Klong Yao* performance may include its language, procession, costumes, movements, and dance details. The self-construction of the Siamese identity, as Burke and Stets (2009) suggested, is that identity is the self as an occupant of different roles in the social structure. They express their identities through their behaviours; the Siamese, for instance, do so via the musical dimension. Before anything else, we must determine the function of identifying the Siamese as a minority. The construction of identity representation would rely on performance tools conveyed through vocalisations, body features, and vocal dynamics. Nevertheless, while Siamese identity is rooted in Thai culture, certain processes retain their unique characteristics.

**Buddhist influence and identity construction**

Siamese adopted *Klong Yao*, initially introduced in Perlis to serve the Tod Krathin ceremony. Furthermore, the instruments were presented as sacred treasures to the temple. Therefore, *Klong Yao* serves a unique purpose in that it enables one to function in close proximity to the time-space of Buddhism. *Klong Yao* is typically present in religious spaces before and after ceremonial periods. The Siamese enjoy performing *Klong Yao* at all religious events except for funerals. An announcer's voice cordially greeted participants at the temple on the day of Tod Krathin at Wat Kubang Tiga. Participants in *Klong Yao* and individuals interested in joining *Klong Yao* were gathered, as he declared. After the monk's lunchtime; the *Klong Yao* team began honouring the sacred being to obtain permission to perform in the area. As 1 p.m. approached, individuals were preceded by the *Klong Yao* performance and walked to complete three clockwise rounds of the church. Three-round walking is a crucial part of the ceremony; therefore, *Klong Yao* is the only kind of music performed during the religious period.



**Figure 6: *Klong Yao* performance through three time-space**  
(Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, 2023.)

*Klong Yao* performance is associated with religion due to its history that arrangements were initially offered to temples. *Klong Yao* were considered temple objects by the Siamese, and they were also utilised as communal instruments. Alternately stated, breaking *Klong Yao* implies the destruction of religious property. Furthermore, the association with religion protects *Klong Yao*, as any damage to it would be supported monetarily by the community or religious sponsorship. Second, *Klong Yao* gets a role in belief; while ceremonies, including secular parts, typically include it, the



Siamese prefer to hold them in temples. As the Siamese minority follows a religion distinct from the majority, their access to public spaces allocated for non-religious activities is frequently restricted. Subsequently, they were compelled to seek out suitable locations, religious sites, temples, and secure havens. Therefore, the Siamese cannot prevent the inevitability that events held in temples will unavoidably involve religion in their images.



**Figure 7: Nora performance at Wat Thungtong**  
(Source: Chayuti Tassanawongwara, fieldwork, 2017.)

Nora performance entertained at the Thungtong temple throughout the Tod Krathin ceremony. The adolescents, also musicians and performers, are descended from Siamese. The performance proceeded both prior to and after the ceremonial periods. Although constructed in the vicinity of the temple, the stage was situated at a considerable distance from the Tod Krathin ritual. The Nora fulfilled its function in order to ensure the event's profane portion was concluded. *Klong Yao* tends to adopt a more precise approach towards gradually integrating into the religious process. Performing activities, whether it be Nora, Nang Talung, *Klong Yao*, or concerts, were the focus of temple patronage. Primarily responsible for safeguarding the values of the performing arts in order to preserve Siamese identity. From this point of view, the temple serves as a venue for the Siamese to manifest their Siamese identity and for outsiders to become acquainted with the concept of Siamese-ness.

## CONCLUSION

*Klong Yao* has amassed significant popularity among Siamese as well as Chinese and Malay peoples; the functions it performs when interacting with outsiders are varied. The Siamese performance organisation assigns itself and its roles to circumstances that the Siamese are acutely aware of in Perlis, such as the diaspora or the classification of a large number of minorities in the social positions they occupy. On the contrary, they understood that they were precursors, not immigrants. The distinction lies in the concepts of familiarity; highlighting the actuality of language, attire, and acting in performance signifies non-local existence; acculturation to routine behaviours is diminishing, and acceptance of central Thai customs is growing. Siamese, on the other hand, acknowledges that carrying out the procedure is an action that takes place exclusively during the performance. The manifestation of identity is a linguistic shift from Thai to Siamese. They define themselves because the roles they once played are no longer functional; *Klong Yao* paraphernalia has been favoured in Perlis in recent decades. The performance of *Klong Yao* is regarded as a musical treasure that aids the Siamese in fortifying their distinctive presenting tradition.

Siamese and temples are intertwined; therefore, temples in Perlis serve a purpose beyond that of a religious institution. The temples have encouraged and assimilated Siamese customs, supported them, and fostered cultural characteristics. Siamese individuals regarded temples and monks as fortifications of Thai identity and shelter. Siamese may feel liberated to exhibit Thai culture and express Thai identity in the temples. The *Klong Yao* has gained significant recognition as a musical genre among these ethnic groups in Perlis. It serves to reconcile the religious and secular times spaces, associating the values of tradition with the image of music for Buddhism and enabling the Siamese to express their uniqueness through musical expression and practices.

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