

## NEGOTIATING POWER AND CREATING NEW POLITICAL AND CULTURAL SYSTEMS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH LIVE MUSIC PERFORMANCE AMONG THAI FACTORY WOMEN

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### ABSTRACT

The article examines how Thai women in local communities, particularly factory workers, use music as a weapon in power negotiation through the analysis of musical events and cultural activities. The study concludes that music has become a vital platform for women to negotiate power and proclaim their identities in local contexts, reflecting the changing social and economic positions of women in communities. It bases its conclusion on theoretical frameworks of social space and common modes of resistance. In addition to amusing, musical concerts serve as new social spaces that subvert established power systems and capitalist cultural dominance. The results highlight the importance of supporting Thai women's cultural spaces in local communities and recognising music as a vehicle for empowerment and social transformation.

**Keywords:** *Music, Factory Girls, power negotiation, Thai Women's Studies, Political Culture*

### INTRODUCTION

Local music has evolved into a location of fierce cultural and economic conflict and negotiation, particularly when capitalism seeks to control the cultural landscape by drawing well-known performers or personalities. The emotions produced in capitalist music halls are often more focused on marketing than on the needs of the local population. Local artists, however, readily resist capitalist power. The music these musicians produce reflects the locals' identities and feelings. Despite their lack of resources, they persist in performing music in a way that they feel is genuine and

unaffected by the market. With their regional accents, these songs frequently express feelings associated with the way of life and ethnic background of the local populace.

Through the controlled creation of music, capitalism seeks to centralise these forces, whether by modifying content to meet market demands or evoking emotions aligned with consumer culture. However, local music with solid roots resists this dominance because of its distinctiveness. There can be a conflict between what is local and what is imported, though, when the local listeners' noises, customs, feelings, and tastes do not align with the mainstream outside the area. People in the area may think that foreign music is "not satisfying" and won't fulfil their actual sensations and emotions. Because it is disconnected from their culture and way of life, listening to music from outside the area does not make them feel complete. In order to oppose the powers that seek to control and forge an identity, local energies are being exploited as tools in this ongoing cultural war.

Among the key elements in fostering an environment where individuals feel free to express themselves is live music performances at festivals. In addition to being enjoyable, the music that permeates the village or town symbolises the proclamation of independence and the struggle for human rights in contemporary society. As a result, music is used at these events not only for pleasure but also as a vehicle to represent political, social, cultural, and economic shifts that influence musical trends. We should not ignore the idea that music events are cultural struggles as well as celebrations when examining developments in music. They are forums where local residents, particularly those marginalised by political power structures or the common people, can voice their aspirations to become "famous" in their own communities. Common people no longer want to be followers in music or in society; instead, they want to be the ones who set the pace and make room for themselves to express themselves as strong, independent people. With this perspective, music transcends mere amusement and becomes a cultural tool with political force. Economic or mainstream cultural systems that seek to establish a centre are challenged and rejected through music. Participants in community music festivals fight these governing forces by dancing not just to the music but also to break free from the constraints of socially defined roles.

The political issues of music encompass not only the songs' content but also the circumstances surrounding their use and dissemination. Music was used to foster trust in state ideology. This illustrates how music can occasionally be employed as a tool for ideological subjugation. In addition to being a means of entertainment and solace, music has the capacity to both facilitate political struggle and establish political power. It is believed that music is a cultural arena where power struggles and discussions take place on many levels, particularly among local communities where capitalism's economic and cultural might has attempted to take control. When studying the evolution of music, we must not overlook the fact that music events are both celebrations and cultural struggles. These are places where locals can express their desire to become "famous" in their own communities, especially those who are ostracised by governmental power structures or the general populace. The general public no longer wants to be followers in society or in

music; instead, they want to be the ones who set the pace and create space for themselves to express themselves as powerful, self-reliant individuals.

The article examines how power dynamics and culture can be projected through music. Among the overlapping social, economic, and political contexts in the knowledge space that are not disregarded are the issues of female friendships and women's power, which place a high priority on gender equality. By examining the experiences of Thai women workers who must adapt to the capitalist period, this study has created a new space for debate, a new body of knowledge, and new answers at the local level that can be linked to the dynamics of local power. It accomplishes this by employing music and sound as keys to unlock the information space that allows us to comprehend people and society. This paper examines how Thai women in local communities, particularly factory workers, use music as a weapon in power negotiation through the analysis of musical events and cultural activities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative study. The researcher employs the musicological technique to evaluate relevant literature, collect field data, and then organise the data for analysis and presentation, as shown below: In this field study, the researcher conducted interviews with informants at various locations and times. The researcher conducted formal and informal interviews with informants using a human ethics-approved questionnaire. For recording field data and image and sound data collection.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPT**

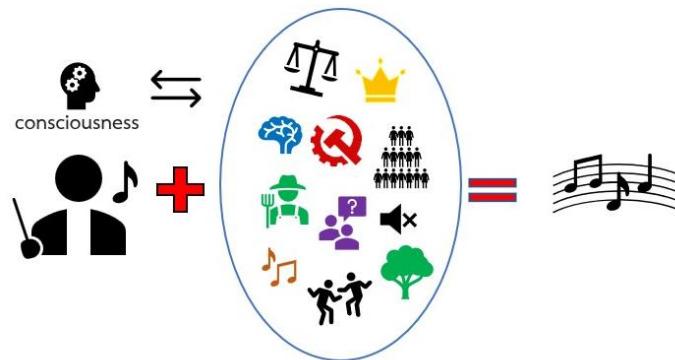
The study of music as a tool for power negotiation by local women requires diverse theoretical frameworks to understand this phenomenon. The main concepts used in the analysis include social space theory, everyday resistance, and feminist theory on cultural empowerment.

The concept of social space proposed by Lefebvre (1991) and Gans (2002) suggests that space is not merely physical but is constructed and reproduced through people's daily practices. Soja (2010) further developed this concept by demonstrating that social space is both a product and a tool of power negotiation. This aligns with findings by Gaventa (2006), Gupta & Ferguson (2008), and Nicholls (2009), who discovered that cultural spaces in local communities serve as arenas for power struggles between different social groups.

Contemporary cultural studies have evolved beyond the traditional definition of culture as "social prosperity." Current scholars view culture not as a static entity passed down through generations, but as a dynamic process with continuous movement and adaptation. Music, as a form of culture, exhibits similar characteristics: it continuously adapts and develops to respond to changing social contexts, both in terms of survival and political instrumentalisation. However, Mukdawijit (2021) points out that most music

studies often neglect to analyse power relations embedded in mainstream history, which is produced and transmitted by powerful groups, including the impact of such history on the development of music, people, and society. Therefore, studying music history requires emphasis on analysing human agency using practice theory as a framework for understanding the role and influence of humans on musical systems in historical processes

The use of music in social spaces reflects the complexities of power dynamics. Explain that music is more than just a means of emotional expression; it is also a technique for constructing and maintaining social spaces for oppressed groups. Meanwhile, evidence suggests that community music events create spaces for negotiation that challenge traditional power dynamics. The concept of daily resistance offers a valuable framework for understanding how weak groups engage with dominant authority. This notion was used to examine resistance through popular culture, and it was found that cultural expression in daily life is a successful form of resistance because it generates new places and meanings rather than confronting power directly.



**Figure 1: The relationship between theoretical concepts used in analysis**  
(Source: Author, 2024.).

### Feminist Musicology

Feminist interested in the relationships between women (of all varieties) and men (of all varieties) rather than in espousing a particular case for either women or men. I am far more interested in why women and men have not achieved gender equality than in decrying the fact that they have not. Thus, the word feminism, for me, does not imply "for women only," but, rather, points to and exposes the obvious reality that it is women, after all, who are most often the unequal partners in these power relations. To me, all people who resist inequality based on gender are feminists. Thus, the study of gender is the lens through which I most clearly see inequality, but feminism is how I enact the

knowledge I have gained in this work to resist and dismantle it (Koskoff, 2014). Humans are the creators of music, and society and the environment both influence and shape this creative output. Therefore, a thorough understanding of people is required in order to comprehend music. Another method of education that can transcend national boundaries and colonial boundaries and help people comprehend people of different ethnic backgrounds is the study of ethnic music. People now accept and understand diverse music more than they did before learning about the various ethnic musical practices practised around the world.

Humans create music as a creative endeavour. Humans are influenced by society and their surroundings (Pikulsri, 2017). To comprehend the phenomenon of local women employing music as a weapon in power negotiation, a range of feminist ideas, musicology, and ethnomusicology must be employed. Among the main concepts used in the study are feminist theories of social space, everyday resistance, and cultural empowerment.

### **Field The sounds: A challenge to the People Against Their History**

The modern paradigm of musicology focuses on music itself and examines its qualities, going beyond the analysis of music outside of Western civilisation. Nonetheless, musicology in Thailand has begun to transcend the confines of Western colonial thought, leading certain musicology fields to employ sound and music as instruments for understanding people, much as anthropology does through its procedures and methodologies. Since sound and everything that revolves around music are connected to society, culture, the economy, and politics, musicology studies do not merely concentrate on music. It begins with listening to sounds and using musical instruments to conduct research and data collection to observe a variety of phenomena, such as who the music is communicating with, why, and how it affects people and society. It then employs field studies to study and live in the field of knowledge. What are the opinions of those who perform? They must believe that music is not just music, devoid of any power connection. In Thailand nowadays, a large number of anthropologists and musicologists employ integrated approaches to cross-disciplinary research in order to gather and evaluate evidence for engaging presentations.

The repetition of the same happenings or a certain body of knowledge should not be the exclusive focus of historical music studies. The history of each era has distinctive characteristics that cannot be explained by merely quoting past events. Therefore, history is a vast body of information that is always evolving. It is not what a scripture is. The context, significance, and repercussions of events, such as battles or revolutions, can differ even when they are the same. This historical recurrence is therefore less of a regression and more of a reconstruction. New opportunities might arise throughout this procedure. History shouldn't be viewed as a collection of unchangeable facts. History is full of unrealised possibilities. The actual appearance may be only one of many hidden choices.

In contemporary times, popular history is not the only topic of interest for musicology. To obtain recollections from the knowledge field, musicology will investigate the actual knowledge domain. Historical memories may not always have to be accepted as accurate historical facts. However, memories derived from music, literature, and sounds are subject to selection, coercion, and forced forgetfulness. In the cycle of remembering and forgetting, the social process decides to develop and remove something that could injure people's minds. For instance, nationalist songs that incite nationalism are used in Thai government music to carry out official agendas. Therefore, the history taught in music textbooks must align with nationalist ideology. Even after nearly a century, such ideas continue to shape music education today. Additionally, the Thai state's aspirations to become a civilised metropolis influenced the nationalist idea of the period, unintentionally shaping Thai music.

Certain investigations of Thai Ethnomusicology are thus unwittingly influenced by political contexts, both royalist and colonial. Aesthetics and the beauty of music are understood in some Thai academic studies within the framework of Western music theory or music theory from the Thai state's central power, which has an accidental impact on the beauty of local and ethnic music. This essay invites an academic debate to highlight history in multiple dimensions, the creative potential of ethnic music adapted for survival, and the assessment of some voices lost to society.

Every community has the voices of the weak. Since the helpless have few other options, music has always been a part of the battle. The dialectical study technique of seeing both sides in a connected manner to combat bias is employed in education, recognising sound as a component of the class struggle, to document the history of the people, and to liberate them.

### **Capitalist Aesthetics: The Power to Control Life through Musical The concept of beauty**

Examining the music of various regions of the world might raise questions about the relationship between ethnic music and its people, or about how it differs from other ethnic musical cultures outside the mainstream American musical culture. This may prompt people to consider cultural variety. Every human being can be found within a musical cultural space, which includes a rich history, a cultural setting, and musical sounds. (Nettl, 1983: 428–443). It's worth discussing the sound of cultural diversity and world music in order to understand the amazing and lovely diversity that is mirrored in musical philosophy worldwide

Due to capitalism's attempts to control this cultural space through the attraction of well-known singers and large concerts, which are frequently laden with emotional production focused more on market performance than on the needs of the local population, local music has become a site of intense negotiation and contestation between economic and cultural forces. Local artists, however, are challenging to subjugate to capitalist authority. These musicians decide to write music that captures the community's

feelings and identity. Despite their lack of wealth, they persist on performing music in a way that they feel is genuine and unaffected by the forces of the capitalist market. These songs frequently express feelings associated with the locals' ethnic status and way of life through local. Through the controlled production of music, capitalism seeks to centralise these forces, whether by tailoring content to market demands or by establishing connections with consumer culture. Local music, on the other hand, is strong in its distinctiveness and resists this dominance. There might be a conflict between what is local and what is imported when the local listeners' feelings and sounds do not align with the mainstream outside the area. People in the area may think that foreign music is "not satisfying" and will not fulfil their actual sensations and emotions. Because it is disconnected from their culture and way of life, listening to music from outside the area does not make them feel complete.

When we apply Michel Foucault's theories and investigations into the concepts of aesthetics and the beauty of music. If we look at the body of knowledge that has been used to explain music in the past, we can see that the philosophers and composers from the group of superpowers are all the ones who have contributed to the body of knowledge, whether in the form of theory or aesthetics. Only persons close to the establishment of knowledge, power, and the political structures that support it can be recognised as knowledge sources within Thai society. This essay in no way undermines the aesthetic appeal of music or the worth of other people. Rather than ignoring beauty that may not be flawless or of the same calibre as what the Western world's mainstream of knowledge has established, it encourages readers to see beauty in diverse forms. These will enable us to comprehend music in ways that go beyond the traits of Western music. Popular music that the state has deemed beautiful, which is described as elegant, detailed, intellectually elevating, sensitive, and not vulgar. By referring out that this is "beauty," "the aesthetics of music," and something valuable about music, it encourages us to recognize the beauty of music that is not praised by organisations that the state or those in power have used as a means of producing and creating musical discourse, such as music schools, associations of music philosophers, prominent state musicians, etc. Due to societal factors that affect music education, Western classical music remains the standard for musical beauty in the modern world, despite the introduction of colonialism, World War II, and internet culture in the twenty-first century. At the same time, folk music has been disregarded since it is thought to be as beautiful and intricate as classical music. Furthermore, ethnic music is another term for non-European music. The mechanisms of knowing power that create social truths about the body of knowledge of music are visible through the lens of Musicology.

Using sound and musicological instruments to reveal the hidden essence of music and people's lives, musicology is a field of study that focuses on ethnic music to understand people. Musicology is the study of music that explains the relationships, conflicts, and social interactions between music and people's lives, drawing on both textbooks and the learner's own experiences. Each community's music has its own distinct context and significance, and it has evolved and altered in tandem with its own politics,

economy, and society. In the realm of knowledge, musicologists can observe how individuals in various musical cultures create music, what they make sounds for, and what transpires around that sound. They can also experience social interactions and emotional manifestations in every location and time. Because music is life, culture, and emotions, it is more than just learning notes, harmony, and performing techniques. Thus, it is essential to use both textbooks and personal experiences to comprehend music and the spirit concealed in sound. However, another attractiveness of this work is that it is explained through the experiences of musicologists and people who study it. It is an additional educational procedure for individuals who interpret music through the lenses or framework of the musicologist.

### **Live music performance: the struggle for political space between the state and the local community**

Live music, or live music performances, is one kind of musical activity. The audience, who are both performers and viewers in the same location and time, are connected to the artists who perform through an artificial culture that has emerged in recent years to reflect the development of musical culture. Music develops and adapts to society's changing situation. Old traditions that are unable to adapt to their time's social context are supplanted by artificial traditions. It develops, replicates, and modifies a value system that draws on antiquated elements to accommodate the current social context. Parade floats in the Northeast are examples of live music performances that demonstrate how live music has developed from community members performing. Like many folk performances, it has evolved and changed to suit the needs of the audience. Additionally, there is still music that is connected to the locals' traditions, way of life, and merit-making.

The purpose of live music performances, regardless of their format, is to engage the audience. The stage is a place where joy, despair, and laughter are expressed, revealing that musicians' performances can instantly and effectively connect with the community. Not only are performers present, but others are as well during live music events. At the same time, the audience transforms into artists, scholars, and critics of artists. Various technologies are introduced and used in performances to help live music compete in the labour market of the creative business. It must also continue to evolve, leading to the use of different forms of capital in performances, whether in fashion, attire, or performances, all of which need to be continuously updated to stay current. This enables live performances to meet the demands of both locals and visitors. The fight for cultural and political dominance has also found a home in live music performances. While the traditional state claims that the use of specific regional languages or dance moves indicates improper behaviour and goes against the central government's moral standards, these practices are always present at local live music performances and are not rude or improper; rather, they are done for entertainment.

On the other hand, local culture's attractiveness or aesthetics differs from state culture when aesthetics are considered. Furthermore, it is occasionally observed that live

music performances influenced by local culture are currently more popular than those influenced by state culture. For instance, in works that incorporate local culture and Isan music from Thailand, once viewed as inferior and archaic, many local cultures have reverted to mainstream culture in this field of musical competition. This includes the Isan language, Isan music, dancing, and performances, which have taken on the meaning of the mainstream and local culture has regained its dominance over the state.

### **Local Women's Power Negotiation and Music: An Examination of Factory Girls and the Development of New Social Spaces**

Over the last ten years, social and economic shifts have significantly impacted women's status and responsibilities in their communities, particularly their participation in the industrial workforce. It was discovered that when women joined the industrial workforce in Asia, especially Thailand, power dynamics in families and communities changed. Women's economic standing changed as they began earning their own money, but it also affected their cultural expression and way of life. This shift is reflected in Thai society's "factory girl" phenomenon. According to research, women's entry into the rural industrial labour force has altered not only the financial situation of their families but also the power dynamics within the community, particularly in the use of cultural spaces and the planning of musical events. By managing their own resources and cultural spaces, factory girls can subvert the established power structure that frequently restricts women's roles to the home.

The perception of Asian or Thai factory girls as a cheap, flexible labour force is widespread. The culture that factory girls have created, however, is unique and reflects their identity. Music consumption, fashion, and the use of social media for self-expression and communication with female coworkers in other fields are examples of how a fusion of local identities and globalisation characterises their culture. Sexual harassment and lower pay than male employees are two examples of gender inequality that factory girls must deal with at work. Additionally, they are constrained by cultural norms that prioritise women in the home over in the workforce. (Pun, 2005) In Southeast Asia, shifting economic conditions have also forced factory girls to assume new responsibilities within their families and communities. Even in countries that continue to maintain conventional female roles, women are increasingly earning their own salaries and exercising greater autonomy in decision-making (Mills, 1999). Factory girls have, however, devised ways to counteract these forces, including networking with women's rights organisations and mobilising to demand labour rights. Factory girls in Thailand frequently join unions and labour groups to demand better working conditions. For example, labour rules were changed in the 1980s as a result of the battles of women workers in the textile sector.

Understanding factory girl culture as a venue that symbolises a fight against oppression based on gender and class is made easier by feminist theory. According to this perspective, factory girls are agents of social and cultural transformation rather than only

victims of the industrial system. Oppressive social institutions are challenged in various ways, such as through labour protests or the media (Mohanty, 2003). Thai factory girls' attempts to establish a cultural space are also reflected in their musical expressions. Their musical preferences frequently mirror working-class realities, including the challenges of the job, aspirations for the future, and the pursuit of individual autonomy. In addition to being amusing, these songs serve as a vehicle for challenging repressive societal norms and fostering solidarity among female labourers.



**Figure 2: Rod – Hae (Music trucks, trucks with speakers mounted in trucks, available in various sizes)**

(Source: Chitsanupong Intarakaew, 2022.)

The fight for cultural space through particular expressions and activities, such as the “Rod – Hae” (music trucks), which are folk cultural symbols of joy and freedom, is one intriguing phenomenon. To question conventional beliefs and create spaces for expression, factory girls frequently organise festivities in their neighbourhoods or workplaces. According to feminist theory, these endeavours reflect their efforts to establish cultural environments that enable women to exercise self-determination. It is forbidden to dance in a civilised way or without embarrassment. They either fight against traditional norms to express themselves or dance to fit the stereotypes of what men want women to be. The significance that factory girls attach to their own gender is another prevalent way that they express themselves. Some people view dances that emphasise unbridled body movement and confidence as a protest against ideas that limit women's responsibilities to neatness and modesty. Physical expressions that emphasise pride in one's individuality and femininity subvert the patriarchal system in their own special

ways. Despite traditional and patriarchal beliefs that dancing while creating noise is bad, they show why they can't dance like men.



**Figure 3: Thailand's factory girls at Rod – Hae performance and dancing**  
(Source: Chitsanupong Intarakaew, 2024.)

Additionally, a major component of the factory girls' fight for cultural space is their disregard for or opposition to traditional patriarchal ideals. They demonstrate this through their use of online media to connect with other networks, their clothing that blends local and modern fashions, and their musical choices that reflect working-class life. These behaviours contribute to the development of new identities that prioritise independence and self-determination over conformity to conventional ideals.

Music's power to change how people use public spaces also affected how the community viewed and felt about women's responsibilities. The community's perception of women's roles and capacities was altered by the factory girls' skillful management and control of public space. Building acceptance and respect among community members was facilitated by the effectiveness of planning music festivals and activities. However, there were still numerous obstacles in the way of factory girls using music to create new social spaces, such as opposition from conservative community groups who saw women planning music festivals and concerts as a threat to established traditions.

Furthermore, the autonomy of factory girls' cultural spaces was shown to be severely impeded by the intrusions of cultural capitalism and economic limitations. The use of music by factory girls to establish new social spaces may nonetheless alter the power relations in the area despite the obstacles. Creating and managing their own cultural spaces was a significant step toward women's empowerment and a shift in the balance of power in society. The dynamic and continuous process of power negotiation through music and culture will result in a lasting social revolution.

## CONCUSSION

Music not only represents the grandeur, beauty, and cultural richness of the royal family, but also merges with capitalism, serving as a tool to project the intersecting dynamics of power, culture, social context, and economy. Music may be compared to using sound as a key to unlock the realm of knowledge and to understand individuals and society. Nonetheless, it is a highly intriguing field in the context of this study, as it encompasses a body of musical knowledge derived from the musical power of Western colonialists, who have had a major impact on Thailand by establishing Western musical concepts and by reclaiming the nation from colonial powers.

However, in Thailand, what is considered attractive is always determined by the ruling class or those in authority, such as the Bangkok elite, the nation's capital. As a result, the capital is considered more lovely when local aesthetics are compared.

Thai factory girls occasionally use the area as a stage to show off their individuality by defying the authority figures who shape their personalities. The singing, dancing, and noise-making of factory women. They acknowledge that they are not women who must be subservient to males, that they have an income that allows them to sustain themselves, and that they do not wish to be bound by patriarchal concepts.

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