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OCCIDENTAL MUSICAL TERMS IN THAI

Occidental music has been present in Thailand since the sixteenth century as a result of diplomatic exchanges and international relationships with missionaries. Today, Thai people use Occidental musical terms that were widely studied and translated during the twentieth century. These equivalents have been incorporated into Thai in three principal ways: transliteration, translation and coinage. Problems arise with terms that refer back to English; with newly coined terms adapted without regard to their historical context and their origins; and with terms based on Pali or Sanskrit lexical elements, rendering them incomprehensible.

1. Introduction and historical review

It seems likely that Occidental music first arrived in Thailand in the sixteenth century as a result of contact with Portuguese Christian missionaries (Natchanawakul 2012). The first written evidence of this cross-cultural influence is from the late seventeenth century, arising from diplomatic relations between King Narai and Louis XIV of France. There is further documentary evidence of Western music in Thailand in the mid-nineteenth century, when King Rama IV employed two English musical instructors to train the military band (Amatyakul 2008). This evidence comprises contracts of employment; no formal Thai texts on Western music were written at this time.

The first known Thai book on Occidental music (‘ดนตรีวิทยา’ or *Musicology* by Apai Ponrop) was published in 1912 and was heavily influenced by John Curwen and the English style of music education. This was followed by the influential series ‘วิชาการประสานเสียง’ (*Textbook on Theory of Music*), which

was first published in 1932 by Peter Feit or Piti Watayakorn, a half-Thai, half-American author. Alongside English, French can also be seen to influence his books' vocabulary, probably because he was educated at Assumption College, a French-run Catholic school. This is most apparent in the names of note values—for instance, rather than the English term *semibreve*, he uses the Thai word กลม [klom], meaning *round*, which is a direct translation of the French word *ronde*, and ขาว [kǎo:] from the French word *blanche* (meaning *white*) rather than the English term *minim*.

Knowledge of Occidental music in Thailand developed as two main streams, influenced by the Christian (mainly Catholic) former missionary schools and by the military and the royal court, which were influenced by British ideas of music education. As a result, Occidental music exerted different influences in early twentieth century Thailand. To articulate the issues associated with the use of Occidental terms in Thai, it is first necessary to explain the nature of the Thai language. Considered to be part of the Tai-Kadai language family, words of Thai origin are normally short, often comprising only one or two syllables. In the education field, there is a strong tradition of using Sanskrit in the same way that Latin or Ancient Greek are used in European cultures. However, one key difference is that Sanskrit and Thai come from completely distinct language families, and the former more often uses multisyllabic words.

2. Term equivalence: transliteration, translation, and newly coined terms

When considering how Occidental musical terms have been incorporated into Thai, three different processes can be identified: transliteration, translation and coinage of completely new words.

2.1. Transliteration

Transliterated terms, which can be regarded as straightforward loanwords, appear in two main categories of musical vocabulary: proper nouns (as in the names of musical instruments) and music theory vocabulary (e.g. *major*, *minor*, *augmented*). A detailed study of the origins of these proper nouns reveals that

although Thai scholars always identify musical terms in frequent use as Italian (Pancharoen 2003), it is clear that these terms especially those in spoken use have actually been transliterated from English. Among the evidence in support of this argument is the use of English terms such as *cello*, *symphony* and *bassoon* rather than the equivalent Italian terms *violoncello*, *sinfonia* and *fagotto*.

The dominance of English is also apparent in music theory vocabulary. Because Western and Thai music differ completely with regard to theory, it was necessary to adopt most terms from English. For example, Thai traditional music has no concept of chordal/vertical music analysis and so uses direct transliteration of words like *triad*, *chord* and *chord progression*.

2.2. Translation

Translation means ‘to express the sense of words or text in another language’ (Oxford Dictionary online, 2018). This distinguishes translated from newly coined words, as the translated term must relate to a pre-existing word of sufficient equivalence. (In contrast, newly coined terms are built on words that already exist but have never been applied in the given context). In the translation of musical terms, Thai bears some similarity to European languages. Although borrowing almost all Western musical instrument names, such as *violin* (to ไวโอลิน [wai.o.lin]), *cello* (to เซลโล [tɕʰel.lo]) and *trumpet* (to ทรัมเป็ต [tram.pet]), Thai (like other languages) has its own more accessible terms for items such as the parts of musical instruments for example, *fingerboard* becomes คอ [ko:], which literally means *neck*; *bridge* is พย่อง [yòŋ] and *bell* is ลำโพง [lam.poŋ]. Most musical performance terms can also be compared to and replaced by Thai terms for example, *blow* becomes เป่า [pàə], *loud* or *forte* is ดัง [dan] and *soft* or *piano* is เบา [bao] (Kantasiri 2007, Pancharoen 2009, Sukawatana 2011, Tantranon 2010).

2.3. Newly coined terms

Many of the coined terms still in use in Thai today were developed in the first half of the twentieth century. These were developed pragmatically where a concept had not previously existed in Thai musical culture and they share a number

of characteristics. First, they are simple and usually short, and are coined using ‘real’ Thai vocabulary, usually involving the straightforward adoption of meanings from French or Latin; for example, *clef* becomes กุญแจ [kun.jae:] (literally, *key*); *scale* is บันไดเสียง [ban.dai.siǎ:n] (literally, *steps of sound*); and *interval* is คู่ [kû:] (literally, *pair*). Terms of this kind are commonly found in music notation and basic theory. In contrast, more complex music theory vocabulary is mostly loaned or transliterated from English because of the profound difference between traditions.

More recently, however, many musical terms have been coined with very little regard to origins or historical context. Using Pali or Sanskrit lexical elements, this contrived, non-organic approach has yielded incomprehensible items of musical vocabulary. In many cases, the scholars attempting to coin and standardise Occidental musical terms have been attached to some institution. Among these, the most commonly referred to is ‘ราชบัณฑิตยสถาน’ [ra:t.tɕʰa.ban.dit.ta.ya.sa.tǎ:n] or The Royal Society, which is equivalent to the Académie Française. This leaning towards Sanskrit-based terms can also be seen in attempts to coin loaned or transliterated words that are already in common use and known in the field. Many newly coined terms based on Pali or Sanskrit elements contain more syllables than already accepted transliterated words; for example, an attempt was made to replace the widely accepted transliterated term *triad* (ไตรแอด) with the Sanskrit-based ไตรสร [traɪ.sa.ra]. This extends even to the use by The Royal Society of words from Pali or Sanskrit to coin words that already exist in Thai for example, replacing the Thai word ด้น [dôn] (meaning *improvisation*) with the Sanskrit-based word การบรรเลงเชิงปฐิภาณ [ka:n.ban.le:n.tɕʰa:ŋ.pa.di.pa:n] (The Royal Society 2005: 40, 85).

Words that have been coined into Thai by borrowing lexical elements from Sanskrit can be characterised as *false-loan* or *pseudo-loan*. Writing about English pseudo-loan words in *The Impact of English on Israeli Hebrew* (1986: 438), Davis Lawrence wrote: “It would take a very clever native speaker of English to figure out what the speaker is referring to.” In the same way, even a native speaker of Pali or Sanskrit would find it difficult to discern what such words refer to, as the combination of lexical elements bears no relation to any original meaning. As a consequence, these newly coined terms are often ignored in favour of the far simpler Thai or English equivalent. For instance, despite directives to the contrary, musicians still use the pre-existing Thai word ด้น [dôn] to denote *improvi-*

sation; the transliteration of *triad* is used in preference to the newly coined ไตรสร [traɪ.sa.ra], and the transliterated word สกอรี [sa.ko] (meaning *score*) is used instead of the newly coined สังคีตเลขา [sǎŋi.ta.le.kǎ:].

3. Appearance and usage

In complex areas such as music theory, spoken Thai generally employs more loanwords (especially from English) than newly coined Thai words, which usually contain more syllables and do not express the meaning as directly. Theory of music is a major subject for music students in Thailand, and there are many specialist textbooks on the theory of Occidental music. Most of the basic theory terms in these texts are written in Thai and are completely comprehensible. More advanced terms are generally presented in one of two ways: in Roman spelling, or in Thai transliterated spelling followed by the original Roman spelling in brackets.

Example 1

„ชั้นคู่ที่มีระยะห่างไม่เกินชั้นคู่ 8 เรียกว่าเป็นชั้นคู่ธรรมดา (Simple intervals) ส่วนชั้นคู่แบบผสม (Compound intervals) คือ ชั้นคู่ที่โน้ตตัวบนมีระยะห่างจากโน้ตตัวล่างมากกว่าหนึ่งช่วงคู่แปด [...]”

(Vongdharadon 2012: 18)

According to the rules of Thai typography, vocabulary presented in a different alphabet must include a space before and after the word in question. In contrast, written Thai leaves no spaces between words until the end of the sentence, i.e. spaces are used like full stops. For that reason, incorporating Roman spelling in Thai writing can confuse the reader because they will not know when to pause, as in the sample below.

Example 2

„ถ้าเริ่มต้นนำเสนอด้วย Quarter note มีค่าเท่ากับ 1 เคาะ Half note จะมีค่าเท่ากับ 2 เคาะ และ Whole note จะมีค่าเท่ากับ 4 เคาะ นอกจากนั้น จะพบว่า Eighth note 2 ตัว และ Sixteenth note 4 ตัว มีค่าเท่ากับ Quarter note 1 ตัว”

(Dansakul 2003: 25)

Although Thai spelling requires music readers to familiarise themselves with the form, this enhances fluidity in the long run and so aids comprehension. This approach has proved successful in music theory texts, which often employ a limited vocabulary of specialised terms (*consonance*, *dissonance*, *major*, *minor*, *augmented*, *diminished* etc.). This is not the case for general knowledge texts on music and history of music; these genres pose a greater challenge because the terms used are wider ranging and extend beyond the immediately familiar. In such cases, the standard approach to foreign terms is to use Thai spelling at first mention, with the original Roman spelling in brackets. In all subsequent instances, the term appears only in Thai form (see *Example 1* above).

The main drawback of this approach is false transliteration; because Occidental musical terms are not always English in origin, many are incorrectly transliterated. For example, the Italian term *Caccia* should be transliterated as คัทซา [kat.tʃa] but has instead been transliterated to แคคเซีย [kɛk.tʃia] (Pongsarayuth 2013), reflecting the influence of English (and especially English pronunciation), as well as a lack of knowledge of other languages. It follows that many writers avoid transliterating these terms into Thai, preferring instead to use the original spelling in the Roman alphabet. For that reason, Roman spelling can be considered the norm for Occidental musical terms in Thai texts. Although not technically correct in terms of typographic rules, this ensures better understanding and fluidity, especially when many different terms are deployed.

Looking back to the terms used in earlier publications, there was a balanced mix of language influences. However, recent publications refer solely to English, both in the terms they use and in their interpretation of music theory and history, and all theory of music textbooks have transliterated advanced terms and their pronunciation from English. This is apparent even in Thai texts, where references to the music literature always use English titles, regardless of the language of origin—for example, *Rite of Spring* (for *Sacre du Printemps*), *The Barber of Seville* (for *Il barbiere di Siviglia*) or, in the most nonsensical case, *Tristan and Isolde* (for *Tristan und Isolde*) (Suttachitt 2002, 2015).

Lexicographers also commonly attribute terms frequently used in Thai to English; for example, in the Royal Society dictionary, 64% of 121 words beginning with ‘s’ (the largest entry) are attributed to English while only 25% are attributed to Italian. In addition, at least 11 terms that are clearly Italian are instead attributed to English (The Royal Society 2005: 71–80), as in the case of the Italian

word *sonata* (The Royal Society 2005: 75). Such errors in attribution can also be found in word definitions that, although used in English, actually have their origins in other languages or are considered loanwords to English. The term *Chanson* is one example of this kind of cumulative error; English borrowed this word from French and changed its meaning to refer to a song with French words rather than the original French meaning *song* (Example 3). Thai borrowed the term from English, along with the English meaning, but its origin was still attributed to French (Example 4), illustrating the conflict between attribution of origin and attribution of meaning.

Example 3

chanson [Fr.] 1. Song set to French words. 2. Type of song, for several vv. or for one v. with acc., that grew up in Fr. and north It. in 14th cent. and flourished until end of 16th [...]

(Kennedy, Oxford Dictionary of Music 1994: 164)

Example 4

Chanson (ฦ) [ซอง ซง] ซองซง ๑. เหมือนกับ song ๒. เพลงหลายแนวซึ่งเป็นที่นิยมกันในคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 15-16¹

(Pancharoen 2009: 59)

Many accepted pronunciations are also more heavily influenced by English than by their language of origin. For example, the word *requiem*, which is clearly Latin, is not only attributed to English but has a pronunciation guide that refers to English rather than Latin.

Example 5

Requiem (อ) [เรค เควียม] ๑. ใช้ในความหมายเดียวกับ Requiem mass ๒. บทเพลงแห่งความตาย บทเพลงที่เขียนขึ้นเพื่อระลึกถึงความตายหรือระลึกถึงการเสียชีวิตของบุคคลสำคัญ

(Pancharoen 2009: 313)

¹ Translation: Chanson (French) [ฦ.ซง] Chanson 1. Same meaning as Song 2. Popular polyphonic song in 15 – 16th century.

Example 6

Requiem (English) [ˈrek.kwiam] 1. Same meaning as Requiem mass 2. Song of death; Music written to mark or remember the death of an important person.

(Translation of *Example 5*)

Other than general bilingual dictionaries, an examination of the bibliographies of Thai books on Occidental music (including theory, history and global knowledge of music) revealed that every reference was in either English or Thai. One possible explanation for this bias may be that almost all scholars of Occidental music who did not graduate in Thailand completed their studies in English-speaking countries. This raises the concern that Thai knowledge of Occidental music is completely dependent on English, at the expense of other European influences.

4. Conclusion

It seems indisputable that English is currently the universal language, and that the use of English terms therefore provides a common foundation for knowledge exchange, making music-related discourse accessible to all. Nevertheless, a shared knowledge of music and music theory should also acknowledge its many influences. In relying solely on an English interpretation of music, it is important to ensure that Thai publications are not unduly dismissive of other European music traditions. Clearly, terms must be standardised to ensure consistency of understanding. However, scholars should invest more in collecting and documenting frequently used words rather than coining new words and issuing directives that replace pre-existing and widely used terms. It is also essential that scholars keep up to date by detecting new words in common usage and including these in their corpus. This standardisation of terms in popular usage is particularly important in the field of pop music, where it is vital to keep up with current trends. By doing so, musical terms can remain relevant and meaningful to the musicians of the day.

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Zapadni glazbeni nazivi u tajskome

Sažetak

Zapadna glazba prisutna je u Tajlandu od 16. stoljeća kao rezultat diplomatskih razmjena i međunarodnih odnosa s misionarima. Danas Tajlandani upotrebljavaju glazbene nazive iz zapadnih jezika koji su se znatno učili i prevodili tijekom 20. stoljeća. Te su istovrijednice ušle u tajski trima temeljnim načinima: transliteracijom, prijevodom i stvaranjem neologizama. Problemi nastaju s nazivima koji upućuju nazad na engleski jezik, s novoskovanim nazivima koji su se adaptirali bez obzira na podrijetlo i povijesni kontekst te s nazivima koji se temelje na leksičkim elementima iz palijskog i sanskrita, što ih čini nerazumljivima.

Keywords: musical terms, Thai, linguistic borrowing

Ključne riječi: glazbeni nazivi, tajski, jezično posuđivanje