

Abstract

The dissertation is a study of Khorat song, a type of folk song peculiar to the province of Nakhon Ratchasima, in the Northeast of Thailand. The song is performed by a group of four male and female singer who sing love songs, narrative songs, and didactic songs. It describes the processes of adaptation Khorat song has experienced once the context of its performance changed.

Traditionally Khorat song performances were given on merit-making occasions, many of which take place at critical stages in the life cycle, for example ordination rite, cremation, cutting of the top-knot, house celebration, presentation of robes and other gifts to the monks. The performances used to take place mainly in villages. Then in 1934 the Thao Suranari Monument was built in the town of Nakhon Ratchasima to commemorate the heroic acts of a certain lady in time of war against the Laotians. The monument became a sacred site, its reputation later spread far and wide. Khorat song assumed a new role as an offering to the spirit of the monument, or *khae bon* performances. In this new urban context, Khorat song has been affected by phenomena such as money economy, commercialisation of performances, and Khorat song performers have been adapting to fit the new environment. The processes of adaptation can be seen firstly, in the way of life of performers, and secondly, in the content of the performances.

On the first point, Khorat song has become commercialised. Performers used to operate as individuals, now they organise

themselves as a group or a company with a manager and an office in town. These groups compete for new resources. Through bidding and dealing and dealing with municipal authority, certain groups have managed to secure a steady income by performing for khae bon to the monument. In this way, Khorat song is now on its way towards becoming a business enterprise.

As far as the content of performances is concerned, Khorat song performances on merit-making occasions, while retaining traditional sequences, have incorporated modern and urban elements in the form of electronic music, dance, popular songs. Khae bon performances, on the other hand, have cut down the sequences. The duration of show is fixed according to the price rates that their customers wish to pay. Little interaction between performers and audience is found in khae bon performances.

It is possible that singers will become more of a professional entertainer, and less of a folk or local intellectual as was the case in the past.