

Abstract

Patravadi Theatre is one of the most outstanding phenomena in contemporary performing art in Thailand. Its productions are unique combination of conventional Thai style of dance-drama , and western dance and dramatic techniques. The theatre serves as a school for training a new generation of performing artists, as well as showing works produced by young directors and artists.

This thesis is a study of Patravadi theatre as a community of practitioners. It traces the development of the theatre, the life history of its founder, the actress Patravadi Meechuthon. The study then analyses the theatre from the points of view of (1) community, and (2) its relations with other contemporary theatrical groups.

As a community, Patravadi consists of (1) the founder and leader, (2) senior artists and instructors, (3) apprentices, (4) newcomers and fringe members. Aspiring young performers join as newcomers and learn to progress by taking parts in a variety of activities that happen in different kinds of space within the theatre compound. Apprentices learn mainly from other members as they take part in daily activities from making and moving props, discussion, breathing exercises, to acting. Through these practices, they learn to take more responsibility and adopt the identity of members of Patravadi theatre. Personal relations are important in gaining space for learning. Trust, discipline, and mutual engagement are important values for a professional career.

Patravadi theatre functions as a major arena for new theatrical groups to make themselves known to the public. The theatre organizes a fringe theatre festival annually and selects groups to perform. The festival is an opportunity for the young and upcoming to perform with the well-known and professional, and many directors and artists have been born in these festivals. The theatre encourages learning from professional artists, sharing of knowledge and technique, and mutual criticism, in order to upgrade the quality of performers and audience.