

Conservation and Development of Central Thai Folk Music for Cultural Inheritance

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Abstract

Folk music of Central Thailand is an artistic performance and an important cultural heritage of Thais that is in need of conservation, revitalization and development. The performance factors of all 5 folk music bands studied in the research were similar in areas of 1) performance stages. 2) Similar traditional clothing. 3) Music instruments. 4) Light and sound. 5) The amount of performers was selected according to appropriateness. The difficulties of Central Thailand folk music are 1) Declining support from audiences, 2) Social and environment difficulties from the influx of modern forms of entertainment. 3) Low wages. 4) Problems with public cultural officials. The conservation of Central Thailand folk music can be done by 1) Central Thailand folk music artists should create and develop their importance, knowledge and skills. 2) Local communities should embrace and create cultural networks, 3) Government and private organizations should organize welfare services system to support cultural artists. 4) The cultural inheritance Central Thailand folk music can be accomplished through the education system by integrating Central Thailand folk music into local educational curriculums and through research studies.

Keywords: Conservation, Revitalization, Central Thailand, Folk Music, Culture, Inheritance

1. INTRODUCTION

Phleng Phuenban or Folk music means the music of villagers that contains lyrics and rhythm that is composed of simplistic words and frequently sang contentedly between male and female singers during traditional celebrations, festivities or during their daily chores in rural communities. Folk music in Thailand is referred to locally in many names such as Phleng Chaoban, Phleng Phuenban, Phleng Phuenmueang, Phleng Patiphak and Dontri Phuenban. Folk music is a literary art form inherited by the process of Muk-Patha or oral tradition, which means that the inheritance is passed down and diffused through the memory and through the direct experience of the knowledge without the aid of records or documents. Distinguishing features of Central Thailand folk music is the relative freestyle of using lyrics and poetic verses that are charming, meaningful and clever. Folk music is therefore a valuable cultural heritage of many generations and has had a long history of development. Central Thailand is a region situated at the low land area of the Chao Praya river and is historically important to Thai history and to Southeast Asia. The folk music of Central Thailand is a distinguishing cultural trait that portrays the creative ingenuity and indigenous knowledge of rural communities in Central Thailand and also depicts the historical events and social status of each community during that period.

Globalization has changed traditional Thai society and augmented the already rapid pace of changes to the livelihood of Thai's in urban and rural communities alike. The goal towards modernization has left folk music and many other indigenous art forms in danger of being lost forever and replaced by contemporary art forms and western culture. The loss of indigenous heritage is appalling for everyone because the indigenous knowledge of folk music is also a medium that reflects the social status of the livelihood of communities during each historical period. Folk music can provide an insight into understanding the past, is essential in acknowledging the present and is a necessity to anticipate the future of Thai society.

This research aims to 1) Study the history, origin, identity, factors and process of the performance, belief and traditions of Central Thailand folk music. 2) To study the difficulties and obstacles of Central Thailand folk music. 3) Conservation and development of the cultural inheritance of Central Thailand folk music.

2. RESEARCH AREA and METHODOLOGY

The research area was conducted through simple random sampling of 5 provinces in Central Thailand of Suphanburi, Ang Thong, Suphan Buri and Lop Buri. The research area was purposively chosen where folk music is still fashionable and many folk music bands are still employable. The research analysis was performed by document analysis of related research studies, documents and articles and from data collected from the field. The field research was conducted from January 2012 to August 2012. The data retrieved from field research was obtained through participatory and non participatory observation forms, interview forms, focus groups and workshops. Research tools included interview forms, observation forms, focus group discussions and workshop. The sampling group consisted of 122 individuals which included key, casual and general informants which comprised of national artists, indigenous philosophers, scholars, cultural administrators, educational administrators, community leaders, reporters, folk music band leaders, renown folk music artists, composers,

folk music hosts, enthusiast and audiences from the general public. The research data was analyzed through data triangulation and the research results presented via descriptive analysis.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 History and Origin of Central Thailand Folk Music

The origin of Central Thailand Folk music comes from the livelihood of people in local communities, cultural inheritance passed down from generation to generation within the family, education and knowledge from tutors, instructors, mentors and from self education through observations and memory. The origin and history of Central Thailand folk music is shared among all 5 folk music bands observed in the research. Notable deviations are in the dance styles and singing which is unique to each individual band which came from different communities. The different styles and singing that each of the folk music bands have adopted is to satisfy the audience and create a memorable performance and reputation. Several folk music bands choose to perform traditional formats and strictly adhere to classical practices. Other bands have made adaptations to their arrangement so that it is appropriate to their contract and event.

Central Thailand folk music aspects and performance factors are similar in 1) Performance stage, which is usually a raised stage about 1 meter and has an area of 8x5 meters. The backdrop is usually a decorated vinyl drape with pleasing beautiful colors. Performances are also conducted on ground courts or on a stage erected indoors. 2) Performance costumes are usually indigenous attires that are customary to the local community where male performers wear loin cloth garment/panung, 3 button Mauhom/polo shirts made from decorated thin cloth and short sleeved. The colors of the shirts are usually basic tones and dyed to give a shiny texture. A cotton sarong like garment or waist cloth called Pah-Kah-Mah is customary. Female performers usually wear loin cloth/panung, Mauhom/polo shirts and sometimes boat neck collar shirts. The fabric used is usually embroidered with colorful floral patterns. 3) Primary music instruments consist of Ching (small cup-shaped cymbals/hand cymbals), Krup (wooden rhythm clappers), Taphon (two faced drum). Optional instruments include Mong (gong), Klong Yao (tom-tom drum) and Chap (cymbals). 4) Light and sound equipment are mostly rented out per occasion and consists of 3 overhead fluorescent lights above the stage, Neon box light at stage level in front of the stage and 2 spot lights shining back at the stage from an elevated pole or position. Audio amplifiers are medium powered about 220 watts equipped with equalizers, crossovers, mixers, compressors and sets of stereo loudspeakers. 5) There are usually 5 male and 5 female performers but the amount of singers can modified for each performance and venue. 6) Performances usually start with musical chapters which are also similar to each other where the show starts with a chapter called Wai-Khru which is an initiation, song or recital to pay respect and salute teachers, instructors and mentors. Following performances include preludes, counter responses from male and female performers and end with a chapter to show appreciation and aspiration to the host and audiences.

3.2 Belief and Traditions of Central Thailand Folk Music

Folk music bands and audiences in Central Thailand share similar beliefs and traditions. In addition to the Wai-Khru ritual before performances, there are also annual Wai-Khru rituals to avert illness and misfortunes. Similar customs include the offerings and items used in Wai-Khru rituals such as the use of pedestal trays, areca/betel nuts, betel leaves, joss sticks, candles, flowers, currency of six 25 Satang coins or six 1 baht coins or other amounts according to their belief and teachings. Sometimes the offerings will include a bottle of liquor. Male artists are the first to pay their respects followed by other members.

3.3 Current Difficulties of Central Thailand Folk Music

Audience: Audiences in the past preferred traditional art forms of dance, poetry and plays which are often reflected in Central Thailand folk music where the music and songs portray a competitive situation between male and female singers, live verses and competition in dance moves which was highly popular with audiences. The introduction of foreign culture ushered in a new era of novel forms of entertainment such as Television and Cinema which eventually garnered the public's interest and elevated soap operas, mini series, movies, western and contemporary music.

Society and the Environment: The emergence of contemporary mediums has altered the economy and society of Thailand. The expansion of commerce, introduction of new technology, large variety of entertainment formats to choose from such as Television, Movies, Theatre, Contemporary music, Karaoke, VCD and DVDs' has created a large obstacle and decline in traditional arts and crafts that weren't able to adapt and survive, leading to the decline of folk music and declining popularity.

Folk Music Artists: The low income from folk music performances in Central Thailand is not enough to sustain their family and is an important factor in the survival of Central Thailand folk music because it is linked directly the livelihood of folk music artists and is the most important reason for modifications and adaptations made to folk music performances. Examples of alterations are such as the decision to become single artists instead of forming a band. Performing as a single artist generates more income and employment opportunities are greater. Many folk music artists in Central Thailand do not have apprentices even though their skills and talents are renowned and careers well established. The lack of apprentices is not because mentors prohibit their knowledge but it is because the amassed skills and knowledge are not easily given out to others and training requires a high level of dedication and patience. The required time and knowledge to learn traditional Central Thailand folk music has discouraged many students and many have turned their interests to contemporary Thai and Western music. The advertisement and publicize of Central Thailand folk music by agencies, broadcasters and folk music artists are limited and lack quality which lessens the revitalization efforts of creating interests and awareness in Central Thailand folk music.

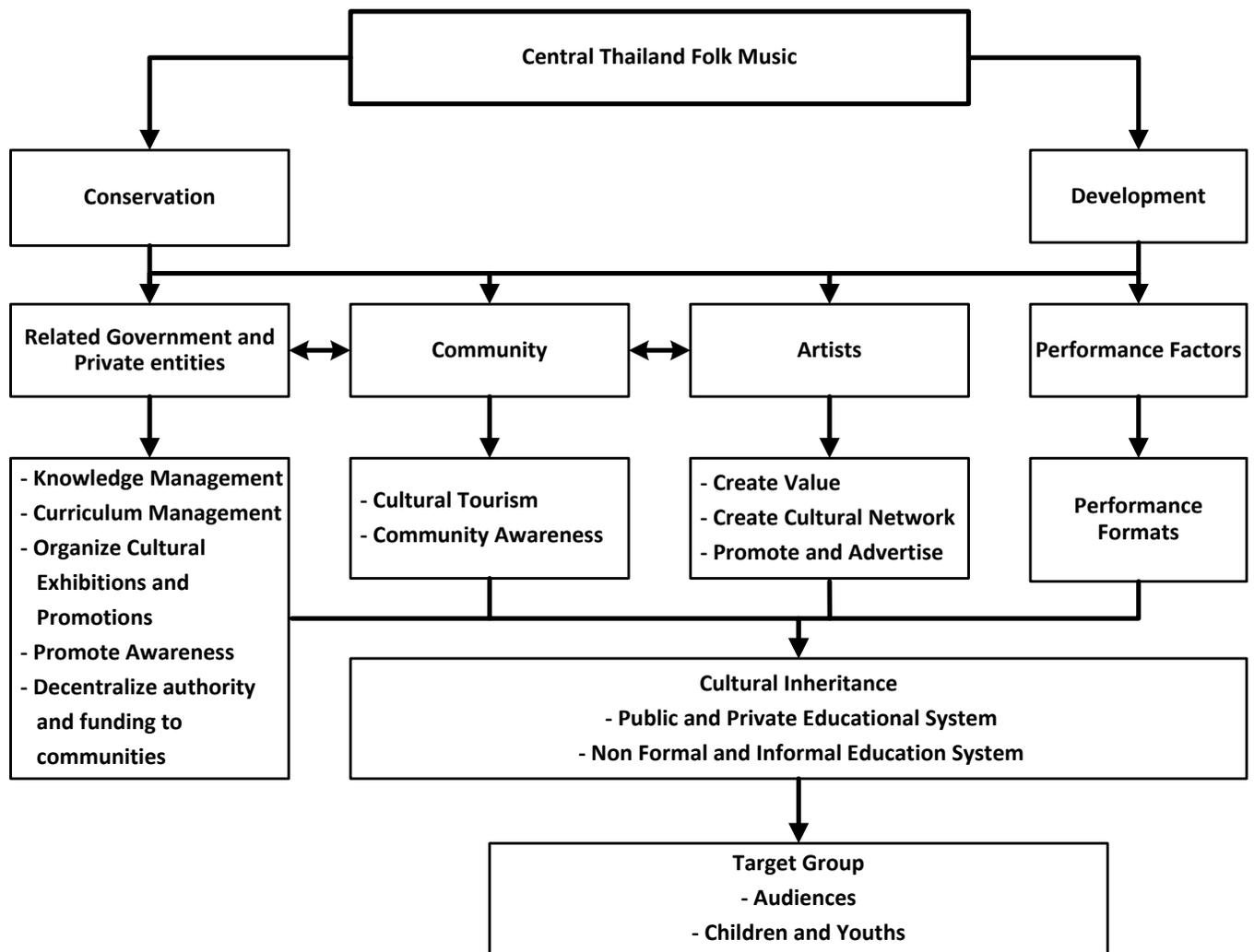
Cultural Administrators: Cultural administrators and related public officials are neglected and lack support from the government sector which limit the promotion and awareness of Central Thailand folk music. Many public offices and cultural offices do not regard the relevance of indigenous knowledge and heritage. Government promotion in local communities is non-existent or not supported by principle government offices resulting in minimal impact in the drive to encourage individuals and folk music enthusiasts in communities.

The data and track record of folk music activities in Central Thailand is also minimal and not systematically organized. Provincial cultural offices do not have confirmation of folk music activities and news related to indigenous artists.

3.4 Conservation and Development of Central Thailand Folk Music for Cultural Inheritance

Successful cultural inheritance of Central Thailand Folk music can be achieved by following the suggested guidelines in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Guideline for the conservation and development of Central Thai Folk Music



Conservation: Successful conservation of Central Thailand folk music can be accomplished through many methods such as 1) Conservation efforts provided by folk music artists in the continuation of development of their creativity in creating quality music through the development of knowledge, practice and innovation. 2) Local communities can provide conservation support by integrating folk music into their livelihood through creating awareness

and enthusiasm in the community by constructing art theatres and community stages which hold regular displays of indigenous arts, crafts and folk music on weekly, monthly and on annual basis. The united efforts of community members will help create and strengthen the culture network between community and provincial groups. 3) Government organizations and branches involved with cultural promotion can promote the conservation of folk music through sincere actions such as creating a systematic welfare system for folk music artists, distribute the authority and increase the responsibilities of cultural administration to provincial, community groups and private organizations. The government should implement their efforts in supporting consistent performance of Central Thailand folk music during appropriate occasions, create a comprehensive knowledge of Central Thailand folk music into referable documents, database and digital multi media and cultivate awareness of the value and substance of indigenous performing arts and crafts.

Development: The development of Central Thailand folk music can be undertaken by addressing 2 aspects of folk music, which are the performance elements and the art of folk music. The performing elements can be developed by 1) Flexibility in stage arrangements is a necessary element that must be adapted to suit the event and the host's arrangement which sometimes requires comprise and innovation. 2) Performance outfits and costumes should utilize bright colors, be beautifully embroidered and preserve traditional values and indigenous heritage. 3) Musical instruments should be well maintained and musicians are in constant development of their musical knowledge and practice. The electronic audio equipment must be adequate to support the performance of each venue. Reference or renown artists must develop apprentices to inherit their amassed skills, talent, knowledge and to transmit their knowledge and understanding in folk music to youths and interested individuals. The development of the art of folk music can be divided addressing 2 aspects. 1) Traditional folk music performances which are direct representation of classical style of Central Thailand folk music which has been passed down through the generations and inherited from each succeeding generation of indigenous artists. The performance of traditional style of Central Thailand folk music should be at least 1-2 hours in duration and be performed by established and respected folk music artists. 2) Adaptations of Central Thailand folk music are innovative modifications of traditional style of folk music where the prominent aspects and style of traditional formats are preserved and integrated with contemporary content, technique and impression to create appealing and exciting performances. Lyrics and verses do not have to follow traditional formats but may be improvised, realistic and easy to understand.

Cultural Inheritance: Cultural Inheritance of Central Thailand folk music can be achieved through the education system where the knowledge of folk music can be arranged into basic study programs in secondary schools, colleges, universities, non formal and informal educational systems (Figure1).

4. DISCUSSION

The problem of declining audiences of Central Thailand folk music which focused on the traditional artistic style of dance, poems and indigenous resourcefulness is consistent with Nuna (1989) where the decline of popularity is due to the numerous forms of alternative entertainment choices such as radio, television, movies and contemporary music. It

is distinctly clear that audiences are provided with many more choices in entertainment to choose from than in the past and are more convenient to access and purchase than folk music and other indigenous arts. Also consistent with Phongphaibun (2000) where the influx of modern media has changed the society and economics of Thai communities and the adoption of foreign culture has brought modernization and technological advancements to Thailand but has also contributed to the decline of indigenous culture. The decline of traditional Thai culture during the past 3 decades is primarily due to 3 aspects, 1) the science and knowledge applied in each branch of development relied on western philosophy, development of human resources through western philosophy produced academics which were estranged from their society because many of the applied theories were suitable for western society but not with rural communities in Thailand. 2) The progress of technology and material advancements has stimulated consumerism in society where individuals are more inclined to purchase items and services which were traditionally produced locally and by themselves. Consumerism has led to the abandonment of indigenous methods and sustainability of natural resources. 3) Urban social values have a tendency to destroy rural values where villagers were courteous, generous and helpful to each other. Villagers that have embraced urban social values lack generosity, live a segregate lifestyle, obsessed with material flaunting, possession and lack unity which has contributed to the loss of indigenous culture and heritage.

The lack of apprentices is consistent with Namfon (1986), where low interest in inheriting indigenous culture comes from the viewpoint that Central Thailand folk music tradition and value is lackluster, uninspiring, not worth the investment and required high levels of patience and dedication have discouraged many students and created administrative and educational officials whom do not sincerely support conservation and revitalization efforts. Folk music knowledge is mostly inherited in constricted circles where apprentices are usually relatives or close neighbors which has contributed to the limitations of successful apprentices. Present forms of entertainment from urban circles have expanded into rural communities which has limited the occasions for paid performances of folk music and the reduced wages is an important factor in the decline of folk music in every community (Nuna, 1989).

Government officials are not genuinely sincere in their efforts and do not understand the true value of the inheritance of Central Thailand folk music. Many related offices do not have strong policies in supporting communities in the conservation and revitalization of indigenous culture. This is consistent with Ruangnarong (1995) where cultural administrators must have affection and sufficient knowledge of indigenous art performances to be successful in their duties and not to just blindly follow cultural policies and give out pre-allocated cultural funds in the form resembling charity soliciting.

The conservation of Central Thailand folk music for cultural inheritance by communities emphasizes a system of creating genuine awareness within the community. The government's role is to be just a caretaker while the most important factors are the villagers and community members. The conservation efforts must follow a path where villagers are free to determine their own outcome, utilize local resources and not what the central government wants them to become. Community self development is sustainable and is an appropriate conservation guideline for Central Thailand folk music. The community's self awareness of their cultural heritage, acceptance and integration into their livelihood must also include the conservation of the environment of their community and must receive support and

promotion from related government offices. The conservation of the environment must also follow a system of sustainability

The promotion and inheritance of Central Thailand folk music can be accomplished by the development of educational administration. The support system should be systematic, continuous and have penetrating effects in creating unified community awareness. The conservation and development of indigenous folk music can also be supported by tourism where indigenous cultural heritage can be developed appropriately to cater to tourists but requires cautious adaptations, thorough development guidelines, be exciting and contain quality content.

The conservation of Central Thailand folk music by government offices should proceed by decentralizing authority to rural organizations and should sincerely support folk music in organizing conservation activities and projects by adhering to the needs of the community who are the rightful owners of the indigenous culture. This is consistent with Saihu (1997) with respect to the promotion of indigenous culture which must be based on material value but instead emphasize on the value of the indigenous heritage and it presents to the local community and others outside the community that share the same significance. Conflicting opinions, methods of development and conservation will always be present because of different interest and benefits invested, but what must always be remembered is that the preceding benefits should be received by the possessor of the indigenous culture.

The format of cultural conservation and inheritance should utilize the educational system where the knowledge of indigenous culture can be passed on to future generations and diffusion to the general public through culture curriculums and classes integrated into the educational institutions such as primary, secondary schools, colleges and universities. The development of Central Thailand folk music should also give importance to the development of entertainment factors such as creativity, gracefulness and audience satisfaction (Lo-ngoan, 2009). The cultural inheritance of Central Thailand folk music through the education system in the form of indigenous culture classes taught by local artists and professionals is consistent with Phuchadaphirom (2009) where the diffusion of indigenous knowledge by local experts and artists is a sustainable and effective method.

The cultural inheritance of communities supported by government and private organizations has evolved into a structured development plan and mostly includes prominent cultural aspects that are distinctive identities of rural communities. At the same time, the indigenous folk music of indigenous groups has almost disappeared completely from the livelihood of villagers which has been brought upon by social changes. Most folk musicians today are mostly made up from government officials, students and remaining folk artists whom have replaced villagers and community members who used to participate in local folk performances. Cultural inheritance of Central Thailand music and folk arts are cultural capitals that can become a profession and applied to meet the demands and aspiration of society. It is relevant to point out that indigenous music and folk performances continue to be inherited but have evolved with the purpose of providing musical entertainment and commercial competitiveness. But the existence of these indigenous art forms still require folk artist's role in the development, modification and integration of western culture which is popular with modern audiences. The cultural inheritance of indigenous art performances by folk artists

through government support receive continued support for promoting tourism and for the preservation of national cultural heritage.

The popularity of contemporary culture and the disproportion between cultural combination of traditional and modern ethnicity has resulted in the neglect of indigenous performing arts which have been discontinued or left underdeveloped. This is due to popular viewpoint that indigenous culture is archaic and isn't the barometer in depicting civilized progress. It is noticeable that indigenous performing arts are in decline and becoming extinct because most are cultural activities that no longer respond to the needs of audiences and are usually art forms that are under developed or those only used during specific rituals related to traditional beliefs which are viewed by many as old fashioned. Indigenous art forms that are still in existence are those that have been developed in accordance with modern social development (Maicharoen, 2009). Indigenous art performances should focus on promoting both indigenous heritage and supporting fellow folk artists. Conservation developments for tourism should be undertaken with careful planning and developed guidelines in order to create appropriate adaptations that retain cultural values and also sustainability of indigenous knowledge and sustainability (Boonyapak, 2012).

5. CONCLUSION

There are many levels of changes and modifications to indigenous performing arts in modern Thai communities. There are indigenous art forms that have accepted change and innovation, while others continue to adhere as much as possible to traditional formats and principles. Innovation is necessary for survival in the modern age and is a clear evidence indicating that indigenous performing arts can't continue in its traditional, classical format. Originality and innovation must be applied accordingly and developed appropriately along with modern social changes where the survival of indigenous art forms relies on understanding the comprehensive knowledge and value of traditional arts and also relies on the revelation of the fact that indigenous performing arts can still continue to exist but must continue to be improvised according to modern social changes. Indigenous culture will always be transformed according to the livelihood, needs and demands of following generations or follow the influence of the cultural migration between domestic and foreign communities. Attempts to revitalize and conserve traditional or indigenous culture without allowing innovations is going against the natural processes of nature and results will only fall short because culture is about the livelihood of humans and only humanly realistic solutions will be sustainable (Aupatumnarakorn, 2010).

6. SUGGESTIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Public and private educational institutions should facilitate the conservation, inheritance and revitalization of folk music by introducing younger generations to the indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage of their ancestors to create awareness and revelation of the cultural value of their indigenous knowledge that has been passed down through the generations. Educational institutions can promote the art of folk music and performances by integrating the indigenous knowledge in curriculums and stipulate folk music

education in art courses such as music, performing arts, linguistics and literature which should also be taught by renowned artists and composers. In order to broaden the knowledge and understanding of Central Thailand folk music, The Ministry of Culture, public and private educational institutions should arrange seminars on various types of indigenous folk music and performances of Central Thailand for students and for the general public. The perspective of national culture to Thais is mostly limited to Thai classical music and Traditional Thai outfits. Many Thai citizens have a superficial understanding of what Thai national culture means and providing cultural education and exhibits can deepen the understanding and awareness of the value of Thai cultural heritage and provide ethical diffusion.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand should progressively promote Thai folk music by organizing tourism exhibitions to cater to tourists in each region and put in place policies and resources for folk music expositions such as Maw lum performances in Northeast Thailand, Nora dances and Shadow puppets in Southern Thailand, Eaw-Claw-So music in Northern Thailand and Lam Tad, Phleng-i-saeo and Phleng Choi in Central Thailand. Provincial cultural offices or congress, government and private organizations should arrange cultural activities during traditional festivals and events such as folk music competition and weekend recitals.

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