

# **Molam Performance Costumes: A Synthesis of Network Management of Isan Performers**

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### **Abstract**

Molam artists are resourceful in memorizing lyrics and have great creativity in utilizing indigenous knowledge in regards to their performance costumes and poems. Molam costumes, ornaments, dances, poems and the continuous development of the folk art have coexisted with Isan society since past to present. The costumes and performances of each group must be distinct from each other to please audiences in order to receive higher ratings and continuous employment. Manufacturing of Molam costumes in the past did not exist and artists wore traditional outfits that reflected the livelihood and lifestyles of Isan communities. Contemporary Molam costumes are now more diverse and some highly provocative due to consumer trends and capital market. Molam artists have to innovate according to the social value of audiences which currently favors Looktung (Thai country music), Movies, Television and Likay/Like. Many Molam managers choose provocative outfits for their artists and choose to neglect decency and traditional social values which will ultimately destroy the cultural identity of indigenous costumes. Molam artists currently require frequent, unique and diverse innovations in costumes with vivid colors. Molam managers must personally manage the group by procuring costumes, clothing, ornaments and other necessities which require large investments which create obstacles in the form of business debts, missing items, damage clothing, inadequate supply, limited source of local costume vendors and face heavy competition from other forms of entertainment. Network marketing of Molam costumes is essential for the survival and revitalization of indigenous art such as Molam. Network marketing

can provide sufficient materials and items for Molam artists and is a holistic network management. Primary factors for the synthesis of Network Marketing for Molam costumes are the six types or sets of costumes for each artists which are 1)The Protagonist, 2) Secondary Characters, 3) Minor Roles/Extras, 4) Musicians, 5) The Joker/Jester and 6) The Lead Singer. Secondary factors are the combination of 1) Retail, 2) Rental and 3) Manufacturing. The success factor is the sincere cooperation and unity of Molam costume business owner in sharing experiences, knowledge and resources.

**Keywords:** Molam, Costume, Indigenous Knowledge, Network Marketing, Isan, Artist

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge in Molam costumes has historically coexisted with Isan society up to present times. Globalization and modernization have created obstacles and challenges in the economy, society and culture of local communities. Molam groups and artists have adapted to these modern changes by upgrading and innovation in their lyrics, performances and costumes. The costumes are essential in creating a glamorous persona and stage appearance. Molam artists in the past wore traditional indigenous garments and costumes and were resourceful in memorizing lyrics and have great creativity in utilizing indigenous knowledge in regards to their performance costumes and poems. Molam costumes, ornaments, dances, poems and the continuous development of the folk art have coexisted with Isan society since past to present (Chonpairot, 1976). Male lead singers wore Mauhom and sarong and the female leads wore sarongs and short sleeve shirts (Figure1).

Figure 1. Traditional Molam performers



Contemporary Molam costumes prefer to choose a minimalist approach to clothing and provocative fashions to create enthusiasm and excitement. Many Isan artists have modified traditional performance formats in order to create diversity and correspond to the demands of the audience. There will be no trace left of traditional Molam values or indigenous art left for

future generations if this trend continues. It is relevant to study the development of Molam costumes through network marketing to strengthen rural communities and create economic development by utilizing the fundamentals of culture, tradition and indigenous knowledge while providing added value and income to individuals and strengthening the economy of local communities. The development of network marketing of Molam costumes will also create jobs and expand business through network marketing.

## **2. RESEARCH AREA AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research is to 1) Study the history and origin of Molam costumes for Isan artists 2) Study the current condition and obstacles of Molam costume businesses for Isan performing artists and 3) Study on how to create a network management of Molam costume business for Isan performing artists. The research was carried out through document analysis and data retrieved from field research. Document analysis involved the study of published documents and research studies of related material which provided guidelines for the final analysis of data retrieved from interviews and surveys from informants from the sampling group which consisted of 99 individuals. The sampling group consisted of 36 key informants who are Molam costume business owners, 36 general informants who are Molam artists and 27 casual informants from the general public. Research tools included participatory and non participatory observation forms, structured and non structured interview forms, workgroup survey forms and workshop sessions. The cumulated data was analyzed through triangulation and the results presented via descriptive analysis. The research period for data gathering through field research was conducted from March 9th, 2011 - June 30th, 2012. The research area included purposively chosen districts and sub-districts in Northeast Thailand (Isan) where there is a high density of successful Molam groups that have been in business for a minimal of 20 years. The research locations included Don Tan Sub-district and Nong Sung Sub-district in Mukdahan Province, Mueang Roi Et District and Selaphum District in Roi Et Province and Mueang Khon Kaen District and Chum Phae District in Khon Kaen Province.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **3.1 Molam Costumes**

Commercial manufacturing of Molam costumes did not exist in the past. Performance costumes were made by members of the Molam group and the fabrics used were locally available materials from indigenous garments. The style of the performance costumes resembled clothing worn during festivals and traditional celebrations. Traditional Molam costumes followed customary traditions and the fashion of Isan society which was simple, unambiguously and reflected everyday life of the local community (Yodmalee, 2000). Traditional Molam costumes were also made in-house by Molam artists or members in the group and there was no need or no retail sources.

Contemporary Molam outfits are adapted from Likay/Like artists who have been popularized by enhanced efforts of local educational institutions in promoting indigenous, Thai and contemporary music education. The augment interest in indigenous and

Thai music have also raised the demand level of costumes needed for increasing forms of indigenous and contemporary art performances that have been accepted by Isan communities. Many entrepreneurs have engaged in the garment business to cater to Isan artists and the costume business has diversely expanded into a substantial market. Costume manufacturers must keep up with the rigorous demands because the current requirements of Molam costumes are frequent and varied annually. Contemporary Molam artists (Figure 2) dress similar to Likay\Like folk artists where replica jewels are adorned for glamour, innovation of Traditional Thai outfits in their wardrobe and apply effective business management of commercial sales, rentals and manufacturing for Isan artists. Molam group managers are consistently engaged in acquiring unique costumes for their singers and performers so that it is exclusive from other groups. The diversity is essential and managers often seek out and employ dedicated tailors and seamstresses. Molam costumes are designed and tailored on an annual basis and requires high investment. The high costs of development have discouraged and decreased the numbers of Molam groups substantially to only a few. There are about 30 successful Molam Khana (group/ensemble/band) left in Isan which enjoy continuous employment such as Khana Siang-Isan, Khana Prathom Banthoengsin, Khana Rabiap Wathasin, Khana Kaennakhon Banthoengsin, Khana Rattanasin-Intrathairat, Khana Dokfa Sarakham, Khana Fasikhram, Khana Phet-Ubon, and Khana Hongfamaharat.

Figure 2. Contemporary Molam Performers



### 3.2 Current Challenges and Status of Molam Costumes

Arguments among audiences which usually break out into fights are frequent. These bouts usually occur in Molam performances because audiences get drunk and dance uncontrolled in front of the crowd and stage creating confusion and tension between individuals and groups. The resulting violence disrupts the performance and sometimes the show has to be cancelled. The frequent fights between audiences have discouraged many Molam employers and they alternately choose to hire or contract other forms of entertainment.

There is minimal development in Molam performances such as outdated and dull lyrics and lackluster performance programs. The underdeveloped poems and performance has led Molam managers to choose erotic costumes and sexually explicit language and phrases in their poems as their selling points. The role of traditional Molam artists is minimal in modern society due to the fact that there are many types of Molam performances that have deviated from the traditional format and choose to favor lavish and extravagance leaving behind traditional values and standards such as quality poems, poetic lyrics, rhythm, melody, graceful dances and quality musical compilations and repertoires.

Villagers currently favor new forms of entertainment more than Molam because many Molam groups are poorly managed and many groups lack employment. Every member of existing Molam groups must find alternative means of income by choosing secondary professions and seek employment in other locations far from home. When Molam groups have an engagement, they are unable to assemble their group in time and eventually cannot fulfill their contract. Many Molam groups such as Khana Saithong Banthoengsin, Khana Khwanchai Daochomphu, Khana Phetphanthong, Khana Khwansiphitlae, Khana Phetkokaeo Chawiwian Damnoen have dispersed and gone out of business for good.

The development of Molam costumes and stage outfits is essential to the administration of Molam performances and Molam managers choose to make their own costumes due to the lack of rental outlets for Molam or Isan artists.

The development of Molam costumes emphasize on market demand and target modern audiences. Traditional Molam costumes reflected the integrity of Isan artists that was graceful and resembled the lifestyle, livelihood, belief and traditions of historic Isan society. Contemporary Molam costumes have been modified to a great extent and resemble those of Looktung or Thai country music artists which have received higher popularity than the solitary performance of traditional Molam artists (Figure 3). The need to revolutionize Molam costumes is a necessity for Molam artists, managers and entrepreneurs to keep up with the demands of modern audiences where contemporary molam performances (Figure 4) must be extravagant and exhilarating while provide the highest entertainment so that audiences will understand the importance and value of indigenous art of Molam.

Figure 3. Traditional Molam Ensemble and stage.



Figure 4. Dazzling modern mola mola performance and stage appearance.



### 3.3 Network Marketing of Molam Costumes

Network marketing is a new form of retail business which opens the opportunity for individuals to become business owners with the potential to create a substantial income while limiting startup risks and requires only a small startup investment compared to classical types of business. Initial startups require choosing quality and valued products. This in turn will create good customer impression and generate recognition. The process will create product movement from manufacturer to customers directly without unnecessary advertisement and middleman such as with regular business or classic commercial ventures. The direct delivery of product from manufacturer to customers will help lower costs that are needed for advertisement which can be reallocated for research and development to

make better products. The development of creating a network marketing of Molam costume business is very important in creating awareness in the identity of Molam. The synthesis of Molam costume businesses will help develop Molam costumes and stage outfits for Isan artists that are glamorous, placid and provide a complete set of wardrobe choices for all 6 types of costumes and provide each type of artists to fully express themselves and show their talents. The development of network marketing for Molam costumes requires careful analysis of numerous aspects such as aspects that need to be discarded, areas that need improvement, promotion and which facets are in need modification and revitalization.

### 3.4 Synthesis of Network Marketing for Molam Costumes

The primary factors for the synthesis of network marketing for Molam costumes for Isan artists include 6 types or sets of costumes which are 1) The Protagonist, 2) Secondary Characters, 3) Minor Roles/Extras, 4) Musicians, 5) The Joker/Jester, and 6) Lead Singers. The Protagonist who is usually the lead male singer wears a loin cloth over long shorts. The entire costume is embroidered with fake jewelry and glass beads and wears an ornamental headpiece or crown. Leading ladies usually wore long formal dress (Miller, 1985), traditional Thai Chakri style outfits or long evening gown and adorned with ornaments and jewelry. Secondary Characters such as male characters where a loin cloth over long shorts and their shirts are adorned with ornaments such as fake jewelry, diamonds and glass beads to a lesser extend than the protagonist. Female secondary characters were Thai Chakri style outfits or long evening gowns with ornamental crowns and jewelry in less amount and glamour than the protagonist. Minor Roles and Extra characters usually where a shirt and tie for male characters and where canvas shoes while females where sarong, short sleeve shirts, and high heels with no jewelry. A musician who is the Khene player usually wears Mauhom (Traditional Isan Shirt) or indigo bleached shirts but contemporary Khene musicians now were a suit with shirt and tie. There are usually very few female Khene musicians. Costumes for the Joker or the Jester depends on the artists and they usually cross dress in the opposite gender, as an elderly character and imitate a hermit or monk. Female jesters are gaining popularity in art performances and they usually portray themselves as a relative such as a mother, grandmother, sister or cousin. Jokers and Jesters usually wear heavy makeup and prefer outrageous hairstyles and amusing outfits. Male and female singers in the past would dress simple and choose traditional clothing that was appropriate for festive occasions. Contemporary costumes now have to be more glamorous and fashionable due to the influence of other arts forms and modern multimedia examples seen on TV and in Theatres. Secondary factors include the synthesis of network marketing for Molam costumes which comprises of 1) Retail, 2) Rental and 3) Manufacturing.

## 4. DISCUSSION

Multimedia such as VCD's and DVD's having contributed to the demise of many Molam groups and increased the challenges for conservation efforts. Molam groups must develop and follow guidelines that are appropriate in creating added value to society and ensure sustainable growth and employment of Molam groups and Isan artists so that folk performances such as Molam continue to flourish and become a medium to create peace and

happiness in modern society. The successful development and creation of the synergy of network marketing between retail, rental and manufacturing of Molam costumes will create standardization and beautiful costumes for Isan artists and expand the market and demand which will increase the income levels of individuals and rural communities.

Most Molam groups face obstacles in the high expenses needed to manage their group which have many members and coupled with low employment and diminishing audiences and employers. Audiences and clients choose not to hire Molam groups because of many factors such as ineffective management of Molam groups, few artists to choose from, availability, lackluster costumes, outdated performances, inefficient audio system and uninspiring lyrics and poems. Many Molam groups have gone out of business leaving only the most famous groups in business. Molam groups that have survived and are still in business must rigorously continue to develop their performance such as costumes, lyrics and utilize effective management of their business.

Technology can be applied in Molam costumes for Isan artists such as modern manufacturing techniques incorporated with indigenous textiles of cotton, silk and also locally producing ornaments and jewelry (Saentaweek, 2005). The livelihood and lifestyles of Isan people such as beliefs, rituals, traditions and occupations can also be incorporated and portrayed in performances where audiences can directly relate to. This is consistent with Hiranpradit (2004) where the performance of indigenous music is relatively linked to community society. Consistent with Weerapool (1992) where the important factors that have made Molam Mu or Lam Mu popular is the fact that the format and performance is in accordance with the demands of audiences where clients and audiences received joyful entertainment and fun. These modifications will revitalize indigenous art and create a stronger society, economy, improve technology and strengthen belief in local communities. Local tailors and seamstress will also be provided with additional income for their families and the profession as an alternative source of income which can be formed as local associations or alliances to include other artisans such as embroiders and designers. Regional offices must provide sincere support and responsibility in promoting development efforts.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Continuous development and innovation is needed for folk performances and indigenous arts to survive the social and economical changes of modernization. If traditional arts are left unchanged without development, innovation and adaptation, then they will wither and disappear from rural communities. The current changes to indigenous arts come from modern social mechanics and not based on an individual. No individual has the capability or empowerment that can decide or determine the future of art. It is therefore essential that indigenous arts and heritage of society be left to its own fate. The diffusion of external cultures, especially new forms of entertainment such as Movies, Theatres and Karaoke have made major impacts on indigenous cultures such as Molam. Molam artists have to innovate according to the social value of audiences. Many Molam managers choose provocative outfits for their artists and choose to neglect decency and traditional social values which will ultimately destroy the cultural identity of indigenous costumes. The development and successful synthesis of network marketing for Molam costumes is a better alternative and will propel the conservation,



development and revitalization of Molam. The synthesis of network marketing of Molam costumes was developed in tiers stemming from investment, efficient management, localizing manufacturing base and materials to lower costs and then networking with other entrepreneurs to exchange ideas, technology and eventually creating a successful network of cooperation among Molam costume businesses. Network marketing of Molam costumes for Isan artists has increased the benefits and revenues of local entrepreneurs and has expanded to national levels. The success factor for the synthesis of network marketing of Molam costumes is the sincere cooperation between business owners in uniting to share ideas, experience and knowledge.

## **6. SUGGESTIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS**

The synthesis of network marketing of Molam costumes in local communities and international levels share similar fundamentals and more research and study is required to enhance efficiency and improve development. Areas that must be considered in future research studies in network marketing and indigenous art should include topics such as 1) Investment challenges, 2) Raw materials, 3) Tools, 4) Local labor, 5) Network manufacturing and 6) Manufacturing process.

The results of this research study should be passed on to others outside the community in the form of training courses, occupational guidelines and workshops.

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