



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Musical Instruments in Isan Mural Paintings: Evidence from Northeastern Thailand

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ABSTRACT

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The study on Musical Instruments in Isan Mural Paintings: Evidence from Northeastern Thailand, aims to examine the musical instruments depicted in murals and to investigate the historical development of these instruments in the murals of the northeastern region (Isan region) of Thailand. This study conducted a qualitative research methodology that concentrates on document analysis and fieldwork to identify and organize musical instruments depicted in murals in Isan Thailand. Literature of historical documents was collected to establish the cultural background of Thai music and identify key mural sites, followed by fieldwork, examining murals created before 1957 in 26 temples, with detailed surveys and quality-resolution perspective documentation collecting the musical instruments and their depictions. Expert interviews with specialists in Isan culture and mural painting provided additional insights into the cultural and historical significance of the instruments which were then categorized by type, origin, and function, using the Hornbostel-Sachs system for classification. The analysis synthesized overall data, the historical context development of these instruments, their social functions, and their integration into Thai music culture. The results found that a total of 25 different musical instruments were depicted in the murals studied. The historical analysis also shows that some of these musical instruments were introduced through the adoption of music culture from India, which contributes to this region. In addition, other instruments originated from the musical traditions of the indigenous people who originally inhabited the area and from other musical cultures that eventually formulated into what is now considered Thai music culture. The musical instruments depicted in Isan murals have significant historical and cultural importance, reflecting the evolution of Thai music through centuries of cultural exchange. These murals are visual records, showing the influence of foreign traditions like Indian music, which introduced instruments, such as the Khong Wong and Khlui, besides indigenous instruments like the Kaen from the Isan population. This fusion of external and local musical elements represents the region and its dynamic cultural combination. The murals also demonstrate the integration of Khmer and Laos influences, showing the applicative nature of Thai music culture. Other than their musical function, the instruments in the murals symbolize social values, religious beliefs, and cultural identity, usually depicted in temple contexts to show their role in ceremonies, worship, and community life.

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INTRODUCTION

Mural paintings in the northeastern region are found on various buildings and structures within temples. These murals were created during the early Rattanakosin period, starting from the reign of King Rama III. Most of the murals depict Buddhist legends, traditions, culture, and local customs, using a variety of colors that are unique to each area. In Isan, these murals are called "Hoop Taem".

In this context, “Hoop” means picture, and “Taem” means drawing or painting. These paintings reflect the artist's faith in Buddhism and local religious literature. They have inspired craftsmen to create works that honor the Buddha and serve as a medium for encouraging viewers to deepen their faith in Buddhism. The content and placement of images in Isan murals exhibit distinctive characteristics that set them apart from murals in other regions, as they blend folk tales and the Isan way of life with Buddhist beliefs. Artists interpret and depict scenes based on their understanding, rather than strictly adhering to the central region's traditional Thai painting style. This results in a distinctive and original mural style. Murals in the Isan region are commonly painted on the walls of temples, both inside and out. They are also found in sermon halls and monastery libraries, and on the Pha Phawed, a long piece of cloth is used to depict the story of the Vessantara Jataka. A mural's size depends on the wall's dimensions on which it is painted. The age of a mural can be assessed based on its style and the materials used. Artists typically use natural colors in their paintings (Hoaihongthong et al., 2022). The murals depict stories from both religious and local Isan literature: the religious content includes the history of the Buddha, Phra Malai, Tribhumi, Puzzle Dharma, and the Jatakas, with a particular focus on the story of Phra Vessantara, while the local Isan literature depicted includes folk tales such as Sinxay, Phra Lak Phra Lam, and Kalaket. In the murals, the artist also depicts the lifestyle of the Isan people and various significant events of the time. Such paintings reflect the traditions and daily lives of the Isan people, serving as a means for viewers to learn about and understand historical stories. Interestingly, the murals often feature images of people playing various musical instruments, highlighting the strong connection between the Isan people and their music. No musicological analysis has been conducted on the music depicted in mural paintings in the Isan region. However, Samosorn (1989), and his team have researched from a folkloric and artistic perspective. They studied murals from various temples and churches throughout the Isan region, organized a photography exhibition and seminar, and published a book entitled *Isan Murals*. According to the results, in 1989, murals were discovered in 74 temples across 15 provinces. Laoakka (2007), researched Isan's Hup Taem, focusing on local wisdom and traditions in the Mekong River basin. This study surveyed mural paintings in temples throughout the Isan region and provided an updated count of mural locations. The research found that murals are present in 63 temples across all 15 provinces. Singyabuth (2017), conducted a study on Isan Buddhist chapel murals within the context of local society and culture during the Siam Era. Through data surveys and fieldwork, he identified 42 temples with Isan murals. His research is the most up-to-date source on mural locations and provides a contemporary comparison to earlier studies. Singyabuth (2017), research also reveals a decrease in the number of areas with murals due to factors such as lack of maintenance, deterioration of the paintings, and damage from building restorations. While the studies of mural paintings in this region mentioned above focus on folklore and art, research specifically examining music-related content in these murals has yet to be conducted. Studying the music depicted in the murals is crucial for understanding its historical context, representation, and relationship with the cultural context of Isan society. Analyzing these depictions from the perspectives of folklore and local history will provide a more comprehensive understanding. Through a study of academic documents and field visits, the researcher found that murals from the Isan region feature a variety of both Thai and international musical instruments. Through a study of academic documents and field visits examining musical instruments depicted in murals from the Isan region, the researcher found that the murals feature a variety of both Thai and international musical instruments. It is intriguing to explore why music is depicted in these murals and to determine the current number of temples with existing murals in the Isan region, which remains unclear. This uncertainty arises because the buildings and surfaces bearing the murals are often damaged and deteriorated. Moreover, some temples have not yet been surveyed for the presence of Isan murals, which adds to the uncertainty. For these reasons, the researcher focuses on studying temples with murals, with a specific emphasis on examining the depiction of musical instruments. The goal is to explore the history, significance, and cultural role of these instruments as represented in the murals of Thailand's northeastern region.

Objectives

1. To study the musical instruments depicted in murals in the Isan region.

2. To study the history of these musical instruments as represented in the murals of the Isan region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Social and cultural conditions of the Northeast Thailand (Isan)

The Northeast region consists of 20 provinces: Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Sakon Nakhon, Udon Thani, Nong Bua Lamphu, Loei, Khon Kaen, Chaiyaphum, Maha Sarakham, Kalasin, Roi Et, Ubon Ratchathani, Yasothon, Amnat Charoen, Sisaket, Surin, Buriram, and Nakhon Ratchasima. It covers an area of 105.53 million rai and is located between latitudes 14°7' to 18°27' north and longitudes 100°54' to 105°37' east.

It is located at the center of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, bordered by the Lao People's Democratic Republic to the east and north, with the Mekong River serving as the boundary, and by the Kingdom of Cambodia to the south, with the Phnom Dongrak Mountain Range forming the border (Northeast Development Plan during the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan, 2017–2021). The northeastern region consists of two main areas which are: the Khorat Basin and the Sakon Nakhon Basin. Several important rivers flow through the region, including the Chi River, Phong River, Mun River, and Songkhram River.

The population in the Northeast can be classified into two ethnic groups based on language families which are: the Tai-Kadai group, which includes the Thai-Lao and Tai Khorat cultural groups, and the Austroasiatic group, specifically the Mon-Khmer branch, which consists of the Khmer, Kui, and Bru groups. Most of the population in the Northeast speaks the Tai-Lao language, which they refer to as Thai-Isan.

2. Northeastern local literature

Isan local literature is an oral tradition that has been memorized and passed down through generations. It primarily refers to the literature of the Thai-Lao cultural group, which makes up the majority of the population in this region. This literature is the result of the wisdom of local scholars, created to meet society's need for entertainment. Its content is rich in local knowledge, containing moral teachings from Isan ancestors, as well as beliefs, traditions, culture, and various forms of wisdom. The literature is expressed through stories, including folk tales, legends, and proverbs, serving as a social intellectual heritage that has been continuously passed down from one generation to the next. The local literature of the Isan is quite distinct from that of the Central region in terms of poetic form, local language, and script. However, it closely approximates the literature of the Lan Xang Kingdom, as the Northeast region was once part of the Lan Xang Kingdom until the reign of King Taksin the Great, who conquered both the Northeast and the Lan Xang Kingdom in 1779 (Thawat, 2000). Thawat (2000), categorized Isan local literature into five types based on its content, as follows:

1. Buddhist literature, including Jataka literature or non-Jataka literature that follows the style of Jataka writing, as well as Buddhist legend literature.

- 1.1. Jataka literature or non-canonical Jataka literature uses techniques and compositions in the form of Jataka literature usually referencing Jataka tales, which are stories recited by the Buddha that recount his past lives. These stories often show the Buddha and his previous life where he was born to recompense Karma and practice various virtues. For example, in the story of Bokkha, the Buddha is depicted as having lived past lives to fulfill his Karmic obligations. At the end of these stories, there is often a meeting of Jataka, where the characters are found to have been reborn as the Buddha. Some stories include passages in "Pali" to indicate their alignment with Pali Jataka. Remarkable examples of Jataka tales, include the Ten Lives Jataka, Phraya Kankhak, and Phra Malai Muen Malai Saen.

- 1.2. Buddhist legend literature includes the history of Buddhism in the Golden Peninsula and Lan Xang. This literature usually appears in legends about significant Buddhist Stupas in the northeastern region, Lan Xang, and Lanna. Important Buddhist legends include Urankanitan (the Legend of Phra That Phanom), Pathamathapana, and Jambudvipa.

2. Historical literature in Isan while some historical literature exists, it is limited in quantity. Historical stories are generally less appealing to the villagers compared to Buddhist literature.

Historical literature in Isan includes works like Thao Hung or Chuang, which tell the story of a Thai hero who unified the Thai kingdom in the Mekong River area, covering an abundant region, including the northern areas. The story also recounts his military campaigns to expand territory into northern Vietnam and southern China.

3. Isan has a rich tradition of folktale literature, as Isan literature historically is a form of popular entertainment. The interest of villagers in Isan literature led many authors to create these works. However, Isan literature follows a storytelling style primarily aimed at entertainment, the authors have incorporated moral teachings, principles, and examples of Buddhist living into the stories and characters. Many folktales claim to be recreations of the Buddha, such as those mentioning 50 lives of the Buddha (Panyasachadok) or some found in Pali scriptures. Moreover, most of these stories are folktales, but Isan people generally accept them as Jatakas. Examples of important folktales include Champa Si Ton, Nang Phom Hom, Sin Sai, Thao Pha Daeng Nang Ai, Thao Pajit-Nang Arapim, Kalaket, Thao Khulu-Nang Aua, and Phra Lak Phra Lam.

4. In Isan didactic literature is abundant and highly recognized, especially for its focus on moral teachings and practical advice for individuals in families and society. These works are often incorporated into Mor Lam performances at public gatherings. The commentary of didactic literature often takes the form of a sermon, without characters, and focuses on behavioral teachings based on Buddhist principles and local traditions, including Heet Sib Song Kong Sib Si, Kap Pu Son Lan, and Lan Son Pu.

5. The literature that does not fit neatly into other categories, as it is created for specific purposes. Much of this literature is used in ceremonies, such as various Sue Khuan ceremonies, which include Sue Khuan for children, marriage, and homes. It also encompasses literature used in Rain-Asking ceremonies or Bang Fai processions, such as various Sueng Chants.

In conclusion, Isan local literature is derived from local stories covering religion, history, folktales, and ancestral teachings. Its primary purpose is to provide entertainment and serve in special activities. However, all types of literature also teachings on how to live according to Buddhist beliefs and local traditions.

3. Mural paintings in Thailand

Painting is a form of fine art that originates from the painter and their perspective, inspiration, imagination, skill, and meticulousness. It transforms abstract concepts into tangible images, allowing viewers to experience the beauty of art. In ancient times, paintings were commonly used as a form of worship for the Buddha, depicted on the walls of churches, temples, Salas, and cave walls, known as mural paintings. Mural painting is about decorating walls to increase their beauty, using colors to create a harmonious atmosphere that complements the building and its characteristics. Most murals are found in churches or temples and often depict Buddhist themes, such as the life story of the Buddha and Jataka tales. These artworks stimulate imagination, convey teachings, and support faith in religion. Mural paintings in the country vary by era, with each period showing distinct methods and styles.

4. Theory of cultural diffusion

In the late 19th century, two groups of anthropologists concentrate on the role of cultural diffusion in societies. They discussed that the culture of one society can spread to another through contact between societies with different cultural backgrounds. Cultural diffusion can occur among and within various societies (Yot, 1997).

5. Structural functionalism theory

Structural functionalism theory, developed by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, is based on social systems, consisting of social structures, enduring patterns of relationships, structures, and activities among people and between people and their environment. Every society includes sub-social structures, each with its roles, responsibilities, and relationships. These sub-structures are related to the form of a larger society, with each part dependent on the others to maintain social balance (Ngampit, 2015).

6. Guidelines for studying history

History study requires a systematic technique that uses both primary and secondary sources. It is essential to link and integrate evidence to explain past events accurately, without making interpretations that extend beyond the available evidence.

7. Anthropological concept

Music anthropology is the study of music within its cultural context, rather than comparing music across different cultures. It examines the musical content of each culture and understanding the surrounding context related to music. Music anthropologists must remain open to continuous learning, approach their studies without bias, and avoid being constrained by national borders (Narongchai, 1994).

8. Hornbostel-Sachs Classification

This is a method for categorizing musical instruments based on the production of the sound. Developed in 1961 by Von et al., this system applies globally to musical instruments. It was based on the principles of Victor-Charles Mahillon's classification system. Hornbostel and Sachs classified instruments mainly according to the vibrations that generate sound. Originally, the system was divided into four groups. It is a scientific and widely accepted classification system, recognized by researchers and anthropologists in the field of musical instruments.

9. Iconographic concept

Iconography is a branch of art history that focuses on the history, description, and interpretation of the content of images. The term "Iconography" literally refers to image writing and has its roots in ancient Greek.

10. Related researches

Pairoj (1989), there were 74 temples with mural paintings or Hoop Taem, divided into three groups according to geography as follows:

1. Mekong River Basin Group, including temples in Loei, Nong Khai, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Sakon Nakhon, and Ubon Ratchathani Provinces.
2. Central Isan Group, including temples in Khon Kaen, Udon Thani, Kalasin, and Maha Sarakham Provinces.
3. Southern Isan Group, including temples in Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram, Surin, and Sisaket Provinces.

The Isan Hoop Taem craftsmen were both laymen and monks and can be classified according to the type of work into 3 groups: 1) Authentic local craftsmen. 2) Group influenced by royal craftsmen from Bangkok. 3) Group influenced by mixed Lan Xang-Bangkok cultures.

Hoop Taem originated from inspiration from literature, especially religious literature. Belief and faith in religion are the power that motivates the craftsmen to create works as a form of worship for the Buddha.

Laoakka, S, there are 63 temples with "Hoop Taem" across 15 provinces in the Isan region, with four of these temples featuring newly painted murals. The stories depicted in the Hoop Taem encompass religious literature and folk literature, reflecting the villagers' way of life. In terms of image composition, the stories in the Hoop Taem can be divided into three categories which are: 1) Stories related to Buddhism. 2) Stories from local literature, and 3) Stories about the villagers' way of life, including various customs, traditions, and practices.

According to Sirichan (2010): 1) During the reign of King Rama III, the connection with China and the West made the relationship more relaxed regarding traditional Thai painting styles. This change resulted in the incorporation of various stories and literature into mural paintings. In the period of the reigns of King Rama IV and King Rama V, increased connection with the West further influenced Thai mural paintings, changing their content towards a more realistic style. 2) The promotion of education during the reigns of King Rama III to V, with temples serving as the main important educational institutions, helped the corporation of literature to temple murals to disseminate

knowledge containing moral principles in line with Buddhist teachings, which was beneficial for application in daily life.

Véronique et al., (2015), the origins of mural painting in ancient Peru through a preliminary archaeological study of the Ventarón murals among the oldest surviving examples in the Andean region of the Americas. The findings were the materials and techniques used in early periods and enhanced understanding of the early painters who started the groundwork for the painting tradition that continued until the Spanish conquest, their research advances conservation efforts. In addition, the history of mural paintings in Lao PDR from 1779 to 1893, found that these murals were created during the Lan Xang Kingdom, which was under Siamese rule right then. The study identified five significant mural places, including 1) Wat Sisaket in Vientiane, 2) Wat Long Khun in Luang Prabang, 3) Wat Hat Siao in Luang Prabang, 4) Wat Si Phutthabat in Luang Prabang, and 5) Wat Pa Hok in Luang Prabang.

Mahinda (2013), examined the history of Buddhist mural painting and found that evidence linking the origins of Indian painting is still unclear. However, it is certain that by at least the first or second century BCE, the tradition of Buddhist painting was quite developed, as evidenced by cave murals at Ajanta, Ellora, and Bagh. Some scholars argue that the history of painting in Sri Lanka is closely tied to the spread of Buddhism on the island. Others suggest that knowledge of the Indian Buddhist painting tradition, along with Vinaya practices, was brought to Sri Lanka during the spread of Buddhism in the third century BCE. It is clear that the surviving Buddhist paintings in Sri Lanka date from after the introduction of Buddhism to the island, Terry (2017).

METHODS

This study conducted a qualitative research method, focusing on document analysis to study and interpret data from various sources. Field data was collected from mural paintings created before 1957 to focus on historical styles. These murals used traditional painting styles and were created with methods, including powder-coating, wet-plaster, or a wax-oil mixture. Interviews were conducted with one expert in Isan culture and one expert in mural painting. The data was categorized and analyzed to examine the musical elements depicted in the paintings and their social context. The tools used for research and data collection included survey forms for mural areas, interview forms for expert interviews, and image and video recording equipment. The data was then synthesized to discuss the depiction of musical instruments in the murals and their historical context.

The overall methodology for identifying and cataloging musical instruments in murals is detailed as follows:

1. Document Analysis: The first phase of research covers a review of existing literature and historical documents related to Thai music culture, musical instruments, and mural paintings, it provides a foundation for understanding the musical and cultural history of the region, especially about other countries influence, indigenous traditions, and the specific characteristics of instruments used in the old time. The document analysis identifies key temples and mural places of interest for further study.
2. Field Data Collection: This was conducted at 26 temples in Isan, focusing on murals that were created before 1957, to collect the historical patterns and instruments used during earlier eras. The murals studied conducted traditional techniques, such as Powder-Coating, Wet-Plaster, or a Wax-Oil Mixture. These methods allowed for resilient and detailed depictions of cultural life, including musical performances.

The fieldwork process included the following steps:

1. Detailed surveys of mural paintings were conducted to identify the specific musical instruments depicted. The survey covered aspects, such as the location of the instrument in the mural, its physical appearance, and the context in which it was used, including ceremonial, entertainment, or religious.
2. Quality-resolution photographs and videos were taken to document the murals. This perspective data provided the means for detailed analysis of the instruments, designs, and relationships to the people and exhibition place.

3. Expert Interviews: These were designed to complement the field data, offering instructive insights into the significance of the depicted instruments and clarifying any imprecisions in their identification. It was conducted with two key informants as follows:

- 1) An expert in Isan culture provided insights into the traditional use of musical instruments in the Isan region and their socio-cultural significance.
- 2) An expert in mural painting offered knowledge about the artistic techniques used in the murals and the symbolic story behind the depiction of musical instruments.

4. Categorization and Analysis: Meaning that once the data from the fieldwork and interviews were collected, the musical instruments were categorized based on various factors, such as type of instrument, cultural origin, function of instruments

5. Synthesis of Data: This is the final phase of the methodology used for synthesizing all collected data to create an overall discussion on the role of musical instruments in the murals, including historical contextualization, and cultural analysis.

RESULTS

1. Musical instruments depicted in murals of the Isan region

The study of mural locations in the Isan region shows that murals are present in 54 temples across 14 provinces. Most of the murals are found in the main temple buildings, with only a few located in the sermon halls. In addition, murals presenting musical instruments are found in 26 of these temples across 12 provinces. A total of 25 musical instruments are depicted in the murals, including:

Khaen (bamboo mouth organ), Saw Bang (bamboo fiddle), Phin (three-stringed lute), Klong Tum (drum), Klong Yao (long drum), Pi (double-reed oboe), Kahului (vertical duct flute), Ranat (Thai xylophone), Kong (gong), Kong Wong (gong set), Klong Tat (tambourine), Klong Song Na (two-faced drum), Stephon (barrel-shaped drum), Saw-U (lower two-string fiddle), Krachappi (ancient fretted lute), Ching (small cymbals), Chap (flat cymbals), Trae ngon (old Thai horn), Bell, Clarinet, Tuba, Klong Yai (large drum), Saw Samurai (three-stringed fiddle), Thon (goblet drum), and Phin Pia (chest-resonated stick zither).

The murals in these 26 temples displaying musical instruments were created based on memories passed down through oral traditions. They tell stories and are interpreted according to the imagination, experience, and understanding of the artist, which influences how musical instruments are depicted. The murals include both Buddhist literary stories and Jataka tales, which are adapted from central regional ideals to fit the local context.

The work of a craftsman can be characterized in three ways based on their understanding and depiction of local traditions as follows:

- 1) A craftsman with deep knowledge and understanding of local cultural traditions, who creates detailed and accurate expressive progress.
- 2) A craftsman who creates beautiful paintings but has less in-depth understanding of local traditions and culture.
- 3) A skilled and knowledgeable craftsman who thoroughly grasps local traditions and culture, and creates paintings that are complete, detailed, and visually stunning.

Studying mural paintings in the Isan region examines the characteristics of different craftsman groups to understand how their relationships and cultural influences, and the distinct styles of mural painting in each area. In the Isan region, there are two important styles of mural painting, each reflecting different cultural influences and artistic traditions.

The first one is the Isan Lao folk style, characterized by its diverse range of paintings across various social groups in Isan.

The second one is the style of Rattanakosin traditional Thai painting, which can be further categorized into three distinct types: 1) Traditional Thai paintings by professional craftsmen. 2)

Traditional Thai paintings in the Lao Isan style, and 3) Traditional Thai paintings adapted by Isan artisans and cooperating elements of Isan Lao folk paintings (Singyabuth, 2017).

In addition to studying the musical instruments depicted in murals in the Isan region, it requires considering the wider context in which these artworks were created. Many of these paintings were created decades ago, and some temples have insufficient detailed information about the artists, which complicates understanding their artistic choices and historical context. Although information is available but not fully explain the depiction of musical instruments in the murals anyway. To address these gaps, the researcher incorporated information about the area conditions, society, culture, politics, and government from the period when the murals were created. This approach provides a better understanding of the depiction of musical instruments. The researcher categorized the 26 temples featuring musical instruments into five groups based on the area conditions, society, culture, politics, government, and characteristics of the artisan groups as follows:

1. Mural paintings of the Thai-Korat Joint Culture Group.
2. Mural paintings of the Isan Culture Group of the Central Chi River Basin.
3. Mural paintings of the Isan Culture Group of the Mun River Basin.
4. Mural paintings of the Isan Culture Group along the Mekong River in Nakhon Phanom Province, and
5. Mural paintings of the Isan Culture Group along the Mekong River in Loei Province.

Detailing is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Temples with musical instruments depicted in murals in the Isan region are categorized into groups based on area conditions, society, culture, politics, government, and the characteristics of artisan groups.

The Thai-Korat Joint Culture Group			
Temple	Musical instrument found	Depiction	Year created
Wat Na Phrathat, Nakhon Ratchasima Province	klong yao, traen ngon, klong tat, kong wong, bell, khaen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The royal procession features soldiers carrying various weapons and musicians playing the klong yao (long drum) and blowing the traen ngon (old Thai horn) throughout the entire procession. - The picture shows musicians playing the kong wong (gong set) and beating the Klong tat (tambourine) while mounted on the backs of elephants during a procession in the Chulapathum Jataka. - In various temples, the five footprints of the Buddha depict people waiting to ring the bell as a signal for the time, illustrating the traditional practice related to these sacred footprints. - In various temples, the five footprints of the Buddha depict young men flirting with young women who are coming to make merit at the temple, accompanied by a khaen player providing a lively rhythm. - In the Mahosadha Jataka, a young man is depicted playing the khaen in a corner of the palace in Mithila. 	During the Reign of the King Rama III
The Isan Culture Group of the Central Chi River Basin			
Temple	Musical instrument found	Depiction	Year created
Wat Ban Khon Kaen Nuea, Roi Et Province	Klong tat	- Signal drum tower	1855

Wat Photharam, Maha Sarakham Province	ranat, kong wong, klong tat, pi, khaen, kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - During the procession of Phra Vessantara returning to the city, young people are seen carrying umbrellas while male and female Mor Lam performers, along with khaen blowers providing the rhythm, entertain the crowd. This performance style, known as Lam Phaya or Lam Klon, involves poetic elements. - In the depiction of village life, people are shown playing the kong and blowing the khaen as part of a traditional wedding procession. - The depiction of village life shows young people listening to a performance by a Mor Lam performer and a khaen blower. - Young men are seen flirting with a girl working beneath the house, blowing the khaen to get her attention. 	1908
Wat Chakrawan Phumphinit, Roi Et Province	pi, rant, kong wong, Klong tat, taphon, ching, khaen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Piphat band features the ranat, kong, pi, klong tat, taphon, and ching, serenading beside the palace of the city ruler. - Musicians are seen performing Piphat music while dancers entertain next to the throne of Thao Kusarat. The ensemble includes the pi, ranat, kong wong, taphon, klong tat, and ching. - Musicians are performing Piphat music while dancers entertain around the nobleman's house. There is also a depiction of a young man playing the khaen to flirt with a young lady in the same area. The instruments featured include the pi, ranat, kong wong, taphon, klong tat, ching, and khaen. 	1909
Wat Tha Rieb, Buriram Province	khaen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The khaen master plays the khaen to guide the singing of men and women during the Boon Hod Song procession. This practice is commonly found in Mor Lam Phaya and Mor Lam Klon performances. - The khaen master performs music for the men and women dancing and flirting in the house. Such performances are primarily found in Lam and Lam Phaya, where the Mor Lam performer starts by saying proverbs to elicit responses from another performer. The khaen master performs music for men and women who are dancing together. This type of performance is primarily associated with Lam Phaya and Lam Klon. 	1912
Wat Sanuanwari Phatthana Ram, Khon Kaen Province	khaen, kong wong, pi, taphon, ranat, kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A procession celebrating the return of King Vessantara to the city. - Male and female Mor Lam performers and the khaen master, along with the audience, sit in a circle on opposite sides of the stage. The male Mor Lam performer's posture resembles someone placing his hands over his ears, as if listening intently to the verses from the female Mor Lam performer to respond. This performance is called Lam and Jai Phaya, where the performer recites Phaya or Isan, or Lao proverbs to elicit responses from the other party. 	1917
Wat Pa Lelai (Wat Ban Nong Phok), Maha Sarakham Province	saw bang, khaen, phin, kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Hodsong procession features dancers, khaen players, and saw bang players. - The image depicts Lord Indra arriving with the Pancasiks, celestial musicians, to meet the Lord Buddha. They come to inquire about the Dhamma and offer their reverence through songs, which are mantras, accompanied by the melodic strains of the phin. - The painting depicts people dressed in Rajpataen robes, similar to those worn by palace officials, striking the kong (gong) to announce news. 	1917

Wat Ban Pratu Chai, Roi Et Province	khaen	- The painting depicts a group of villagers, both men and women, dancing energetically while the khaen master plays the khaen, creating a vibrant and lively atmosphere.	1917 and 1921
Wat Yang Thuang Woraram, Maha Sarakham Province	ranat, kong wong, ching, chap, pi, klong tat, klong yao, khaen	- A procession features the Piphat band and klong yao musicians playing music merrily. - Musicians are blowing the khaen to accompany flirtatious interactions between young men and women. - Musicians blow the khaen to accompany flirtatious interactions between young men and women while they make merit.	1922
Wat Chaisri, Khon Kaen Province	kong wong lek, klong tat, pi, ching, khaen, kong	- The Piphat band features the kong wong lek, kong wong yai, klong tat, and ching players, as well as angels playing music to accompany the performance of Sinxay. - The khaen master blows the khaen to enhance the flirtatious moments between young people.	1923
Wat Ban Pluay Yai Thai Charoen, Roi Et Province	khaen	- People are seated, either kneeling or cross-legged, listening to a young man playing an extra-long khaen. The attire of the audience, both men and women, resembles that of courtiers in the royal palace. The young man is positioned at a higher level than the surrounding audience, suggesting he may be of higher social status. The khaen is unusually long, a characteristic of the type used in the royal court during the reign of King Pinklao, who was known for his fondness for the khaen. It is speculated that this depiction may reflect the artist's memory of seeing or hearing the khaen played during King Pinklao's visits to the northeastern provinces.	1928
Wat Sra Bua Kaeo, Khon Kaen Province	khaen, pi, ranat, kong, kong wong, taphon, klong tat	- The procession depicted in the tale of Phra Lak Phra Ram. - Nobles are performing Piphat music to honor Phra Ram.	1932
Wat Udom-pracharat, Kalasin Province	klong tum	- The funeral procession of Chuchok features villagers performing traditional dances accompanied by the rhythmic beating of klong tum.	1933
Wat Sawang Pho Si, Kalasin Province	khaen	- The khaen master is performing music.	1937
Wat Pho Chai Ban Khok Yai, Kalasin Province	khaen, klong yao	- People are blowing the khaen, dancing, and beating the klong yao in the procession of Phra Vessantara.	1938
Wat Klang Ming Mueang, Roi Et Province	khaen, pi, phin, klong yao, chap, kong	- A procession is led by people beating the kong, followed by villagers dressed in fine attire. Another section of the painting depicts a procession featuring people playing the khaen, strumming the phin, and beating the klong yao and klong haam (carrying drum), and striking chap. This leads a group of villagers who are dancing joyfully.	1941
Wat Sutthiwanaram, Chaiyaphum Province	khaen, phin	- A procession to celebrate the return of Phra Vessantara to the city to assume his rule.	1955
The Isan Culture Group of the Mun River Basin			
Temple	Musical instrument found	Depiction	Year created

Wat Thung Si Mueang, Ubon Ratchathani Province	ranat, kong wong, khloi, saw u, krachappi, ching, klong song na, taphon, klong tat, khaen, kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A person striking a gong to signal the arrival of a Chinese junk. - A performance by both male and female Mor Lam performers, with the khaen master providing rhythms. The performance is accompanied by hand clapping from people attending the funeral procession. This type of performance is typically called Lam Phaya and Lam Klon. - The music band performing the Piphat Mai Nuam (a Thai orchestra where a stick used to strike the musical instruments is wrapped with cloth to produce a low-pitched sound) accompanies dancing next to the throne of King Sanxai. The band includes the kong, khloi, ranat, taphon, klong song na, ching, saw u, and krachappi players. - A group of young men dancing and flirting with a group of young women on their way to make merit, accompanied by rhythms provided by the khaen master. - A person striking a kong to signal workers in the fields to return for their meals. - Musicians in the Piphat Nuam band are playing music next to the throne of the city ruler. The band features the kong, khloi, ranat, klong tat, klong song na, ching, saw u and krachappi players. 	Late Reign of King Rama III to Early Reign of King Rama IV
Wat Ban Na Khwai, Ubon Ratchathani Province	kong wong, khloi, saw u, ching, klong song na	- Musicians in the Piphat band are playing music with the kong wong, khloi, saw u, ching, and klong song na.	1867
Wat Sadao-Nong Khu Rattanaram, Sisaket Province	ranat, pi, kong wong, klong tat	- Musicians in the Piphat band are playing the kong, klong tat, Ranat, and pi, while three young women dance.	1913
The Isan Culture Group along the Mekong in Nakhon Phanom Province			
Temple	Musical Instrument Found	Depictions	Year created
Wat Si Mahapo, Mukdahan Province	saw u, pi	- Angles playing the saw u and blow the pi next to the throne of Lord Indra.	1916
Wat Puttasima, Nakhon Phanom Province	khaen, klong tum, kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Mor Lam performers, both male and female, along with the khaen master, are sitting in a circle, with the audience seated on either side. The performers appear to be engaged in a traditional performance interaction, which includes both Mor Lam singing and the recitation of traditional Phaya (proverbs). - People are carrying fire rockets, bass drums, and kongs, marching along with a lively dance performance in a festive manner. 	1920
Wat Pho Kham, Nakhon Phanom Province	kong	- A picture of a person striking a kong to tell time in the palace.	1933
Wat Si Chom Chuen, Nakhon Phanom Province	clarinet, tuba, klong yai, chap, klong yao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A depiction of the procession of the Vessantara Jataka traveling out of the forest to return to the city. It features soldiers and musicians playing brass instruments, including the tuba, klong yai, and chap. - The procession of the Vessantara Jataka returning to the city features people dancing and performing joyfully. It 	1939

		includes soldiers who are also musicians, playing brass instruments and klong yao. The ensemble consists of the clarinet, tuba, klong yai, chap, and klong yao. - The funeral procession for Chuchok features accompanying music, with participants playing the pi, klong yao, and chap as part of the procession.	
Wat Hua Wiang Rangsai, Nakhon Phanom Province	kong	- People are sitting and waiting to strike the kong to signal the time in the palace.	1944
The Isan Culture Group along the Mekong in Loei Province			
Temple	Musical instrument found	Depiction	Year created
Wat Po Chai, Loei Province	ranat, kong wong, pi, khloi, taphon, klong tat, kong, thon, phin pia, krachappi, saw samsai	- Musicians performing their music to entertain people in the city of Kapilavatthu and the city of Kusinara - People strumming the phin pia during their leisure time	1852 (interior) 1916 (exterior)

The 25 musical instruments depicted in the mural paintings can be classified into four groups based on how they produce sound: percussion, leather-covered drums, string, and wind instruments, as follows:

1. Percussion instruments: ranat, kong, kong wong, ching, chap, and bells.
2. Leather-covered drums: klong yai, klong song na, klong tat, taphon, klong tum, klong yao, and thon.
3. String instruments: saw bang, saw u, saw samsai, krachappi, phin, and phin pia.
4. Wind instruments: pi, khloi, khaen, traen ngon, clarinet, and tuba.

2. History of the Depiction of Musical Instruments in Mural Paintings in the Isan Region

The history of musical instruments depicted in murals in the Isan region reveals their development and spread throughout Asia. Asian musical civilization can be categorized into four main regions. The Chinese musical civilization, centered in China, extends its influence across East Asia. Middle Eastern musical civilizations, centered in Persia and Egypt, span the Middle East. Southeast Asian musical civilizations, including Thailand, Laos, Burma, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia, are central to Southeast Asia's culture. Finally, Indian musical civilization, centered in India, is the oldest and most significant in Asia, influencing South Asia and beyond. It represents the origins of music culture, influencing both Southeast Asia and East Asia. These four musical civilizations do not have distinct boundaries like administrative regions. Instead, they represent musical traditions that spread across Asia, blending and merging into unique cultural fusions. The spread of music in Asia can be attributed to the movement of people through activities such as trade, immigration, religious propagation, and warfare. These movements facilitated the exchange and acceptance of diverse cultural practices. As a result, shared cultures evolved to fit local contexts, developing into distinct traditions unique to each group.

In Southeast Asia, there are two main regions: the mainland and the islands. Historically, this region was home to the Dvaravati Kingdom, the Cham Kingdom, the Khmer Empire (Cambodia), and the Srivijaya Kingdom. These ancient kingdoms each had their distinct cultural traditions. However, despite their distinctiveness, there are notable similarities in the musical traditions across the region. A distinctive feature of the music in the region is its emphasis on percussion instruments. Although string and wind instruments are present in the region, percussion instruments such as xylophones and various gongs are more prominent. These percussion instruments are widely found throughout

Southeast Asia, where they play a significant role in countries such as Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Indonesia, and Malaysia. This reflects a shared cultural emphasis on percussion instruments across the region.

Thailand has embraced Indian musical culture, as evidenced by cement sculptures from the Dvaravati period, dating back to the 12th century. One notable example is the sculpture of five female musicians found at Ban Ku Bua in Ratchaburi Province. This evidence indicates that Indian musical influence has spread to this region. This influence is also evident in the use of the Devaraja system, a Brahmin system incorporating Indian musical elements, in the Thai royal palace during the Ayutthaya period. Thus, the music culture, and instruments found in Thailand are part of the musical traditions received from India and disseminated throughout the region. Some of this musical culture originates from the indigenous peoples who originally lived in the region. Additionally, other elements come from the assimilation of musical traditions from various cultural sources, eventually becoming an integral part of Thailand's music culture.

Paintings from the Thai-Korat Joint Culture Group, depicting musical instruments, are found in a single temple: Wat Na Phra That, located in Ban Taku, Taku Sub-district, Pak Thong Chai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Nakhon Ratchasima is a highland area that historically served as a major city on the border with the central region of Thailand. This strategic location led to the migration and settlement of various ethnic groups. Historically, the Pak Thong Chai area was inhabited by the Thai Korat and Mon people. Over time, the region experienced several waves of migration from Lao people from the left bank of the Mekong River. This led to the establishment of a Lao Korat community living alongside the Thai Korat. Ban Taku is a region where both groups coexist, forming a community with a shared culture. Wat Na Phra That serves as a central space for uniting the Taku people and fostering their shared cultural and religious practices. Wat Na Phra That is significant as it is connected to central Buddhism in Bangkok through Taku monks who traveled to study and eventually became prominent Theravada monks in Bangkok. This connection established a bond between Wat Na Phra That and the Taku community, as well as with the broader Bangkok Buddhist network. This relationship influenced the style of the temple and the Thai murals in the Rattanakosin tradition, reflecting the royal style of King Rama III, known for its detailed and formal characteristics. The murals at Wat Na Phra adhere to the principles of traditional Thai painting, showcasing the artist's skill and reflecting popular themes in early Rattanakosin art. Based on an analysis of the overall history, society, and style of the paintings, it is likely that they were created during the reigns of King Rama III and IV. It is assumed that the murals were created by professional artisans or royal craftsmen specifically invited from central Bangkok for this task (Singyabuth, 2017). Given that the artist was a professional or royal craftsman, the depiction of musical instruments in the murals at Wat Na Phra reflects an adaptation of the Rattanakosin traditional mural style, characterized by its formal and detailed representation. This adaptation showcases the musical culture of the royal palace and the popular music of the central region during that period. This is evident in the depiction of the Piphat band serenading the palace, the image of the khaen commonly played in the aew lao performance, and particularly the portrayal of the traengon blower leading the royal procession, as shown on the inner wall above the entrance to the temple (Shown in Figure 1). The traengon, an old Thai horn reserved for royal ceremonies and titles, and the bells used in temples to signal time (Shown in Figure 2), are depicted in these murals. These two types of musical instruments are unique to the Wat Na Phra murals and do not appear in the murals of other temples.



Figure 1: The Trae Ngon, an old Thai horn, is depicted as being played to lead the royal procession.

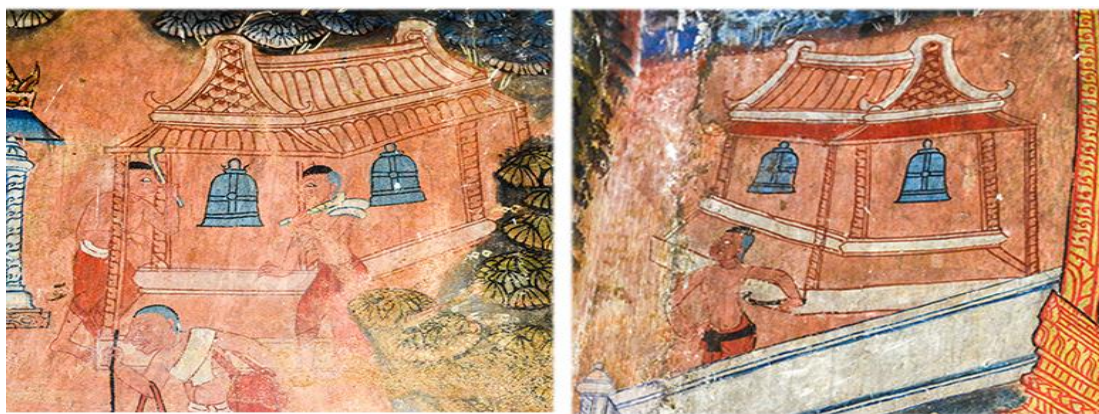


Figure 2: A depiction of bells being used in temples to signal the time.

Mural paintings representing the Isan Culture Group in the Central Chi River Basin depict the local people from Khon Kaen, Maha Sarakham, Kalasin, Roi Et, and parts of Buriram and Chaiyaphum. The ancestors of this Isan group migrated from Champasak City and settled in the Central Chi River Basin, where they established significant communities and cities such as Roi Et, Maha Sarakham, and Khon Kaen. Subsequently, another migration from Champasak City led to the establishment of the city of Kalasin and other communities in the central northeastern region. The migration of the ancestors of the Central Isan people from Champasak has led to enduring influences from the Lan Xang Kingdom on the local lifestyle, society, and culture. Despite significant influences from central Bangkok in politics, government, economy, and culture due to Thai rule, the people of Central Isan continue to uphold their ancestral beliefs, customs, and traditions. They maintain a deep respect for Buddhism, adapt elements of central Thai culture, and preserve their distinct local traditions. This cultural continuity is evident in the murals, which vividly depict the Isan way of life and showcase local craftsmanship, including the representation of traditional musical instruments. The depiction of musical instruments in these murals highlights the influence of Lan Xang culture, inherited from the Isan ancestors who migrated from Champasak. Instruments such as the phin, khaen, and saw bang long popular in Isan and Laos are prominently featured in the murals. Significant visual evidence of Lan Xang's influence is seen in the depiction of the Piphat instruments being carried in a procession at Wat Sanuanwaree, Khon Kaen Province (shown in Figure 3). Similarly, at Wat Yang Thuang Woraram in Maha Sarakham Province (shown in Figure 4), a mural depicts a procession where musical instruments are carried and played in a line a practice not observed in central Bangkok culture. This arrangement of the Piphat instruments in a procession is unique to the Central Isan region and is not found in central Bangkok culture, either historically or today. The tradition of carrying the Piphat instruments in processions was influenced by Lao Piphat bands from the Lan Xang Kingdom. This practice is prominently used in major processions, including those honoring royalty and significant Buddhist ceremonies.



Figure 3: Image of the Piphat procession at Wat Sanuanwaree, Khon Kaen Province



Figure 4: Image of the Piphat procession at Wat Yang Thuang Woraram, Maha Sarakham Province

The murals of the Isan Culture Group in the Mun River Basin are associated with the Isan people who established communities in the southeastern part of the Isan region, including Ubon Ratchathani Province and the neighboring parts of Sisaket Province. During the Rattanakosin period, Ubon Ratchathani was a center of administrative power in Siam, making it a key city in the northeast and influential in Champasak. As the center of Siamese power in the region, Ubon Ratchathani saw elites and monks sent to study various sciences in the Siamese capital, Bangkok, and then returned with this knowledge to help develop the city. Monks and novices who studied various subjects in Bangkok returned to Ubon Ratchathani, helping the city become a center of education. As a result, the area became a prominent example of Bangkok culture blended with Lao Lan Xang influences. Mural paintings of the Isan Culture Group in the Mun River Basin depict musical instruments in three temples: Wat Thung Si Mueang and Wat Ban Na Khwai in Ubon Ratchathani Province, and Wat Sadao Nong Khu Rattanaram in Si Sa Ket Province. These murals resulted from sending elites and monks to study various sciences in the Siamese capital, Bangkok. One key monk who studied various subjects and returned with knowledge of Buddhism and Buddhist arts from Bangkok to establish a foundation in Ubon Ratchathani Province was Phra Ariyathamwongsajarn. He spent the Buddhist Lent at Wat Saket Ratchaworamahawihan in Bangkok, where he studied the foundations of Buddhism. He eventually passed the Pali exam and achieved the rank of Third-Class Pali scholar. Additionally, he studied Thai sculpture, architecture, and painting. Upon returning, he invited his relatives and supporters to help build Thung Si Mueang Temple and established a system of Buddhist education by setting up educational centers with the assistance of knowledgeable senior monks, both within the city and in the surrounding areas. This initiative led to the spread of Buddhist knowledge and art, including mural paintings, starting with Thung Si Mueang Temple. His influence extended to the mural paintings at various temples in the region.

The musical instruments depicted in the murals of these three temples reflect the influence of Bangkok culture, where Piphat instruments were used in central region bands. Notably, Wat Thung Si Mueang features the krachappi (Shown in Figure 5), a musical instrument traditionally used exclusively in the Siamese royal palace. Additionally, there is a blend of Lan Xang culture, evident in

the inclusion of khaen playing and Mor Lam singing, both in performances and in the Isan funeral procession known as Ngan Huean Dee. Wat Ban Na Khwai and Wat Sadao Nong Khu Rattanaram reflect the influence of mural painting through the study of Buddhism by monks who learned from Wat Thung Si Mueang.



Figure 5: Mural Paintings at Wat Thung Si Mueang

The Isan Culture Group along the Mekong River in Nakhon Phanom Province represents the Isan people who established communities in the upper Isan region, including Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan provinces. Historically, this area along the Mekong River in Nakhon Phanom encompassed Mukdahan Province, with Phra That Phanom serving as the center of Buddhist practice. The communities along the Mekong River in Nakhon Phanom have a long history, and being border communities with close ties to the Indochina region, the mural paintings in these areas exhibit two main styles. The first style is the Isan Lao folk style, seen in the mural paintings at Wat Phutthasima and Wat Si Chomchuen in Nakhon Phanom Province, as well as at Wat Phra Sri Maha Pho in Mukdahan Province. The second style is the Isan Lao style, a traditional Rattanakosin Thai painting style created by local Lao Isan artisans along the Mekong River. This style is represented in the mural paintings at Wat Hua Wiang Rangsi and Wat Pho Kham in Nakhon Phanom Province. It blends local folk art with traditional Thai elements, influenced by illustrations from Buddhist history books that began to spread to the Isan region during that period (Singyabuth, 2017).

The presence of musical instruments within this cultural group is particularly notable at two temples: Wat Phutthasima and Wat Si Chomchuen in Nakhon Phanom Province. At Wat Phutthasima, where the mural painting was created in 1920, the depiction includes a Mor Lam singer performing Lam Phaya and a Khaen player playing music during a rocket procession. This highlights the significance of music in the daily life of the Isan people. Especially noteworthy is the depiction of the rocket procession, which emphasizes the role of music in celebrations at this temple, the only one in the Northeast featuring such imagery. The painting at Wat Si Chomchuen, created in 1939, depicts Chuchok's funeral procession with a brass band. This picture was painted during the early reign of King Rama VIII, a period when brass bands had already become popular for leading various parades, a trend that began during the reign of King Rama VII. Brass bands were especially popular in silent films shown in Thailand, where they led parades and improvised in response to the animation of the movie. The depiction of brass bands in the murals at Wat Si Chom Chuen reflects their popularity at the time, as captured by the painters who used Buddhist art to convey historical narratives. The murals at Wat Hua Wiang Rangsi and Wat Pho Kham in Nakhon Phanom Province show people waiting to strike a gong to signal the time in the scene where the Buddha is about to leave the palace to be ordained. This depiction of the musical instrument is influenced by paintings based on illustrations from Buddhist history books, combined with the artist's imagination to convey

nighttime. The artist painted scenes of people waiting to strike a gong to signal different times throughout the night. Additionally, the painting at Wat Phra Sri Maha Pho in Mukdahan Province depicts an angel playing the *saw u* (a two-string fiddle with a coconut shell body) and blowing the *pi* (a type of quadruple reed instrument) as a lullaby next to Indra's throne. This may have been influenced by the practice of using music to serenade the upper class, a tradition from the central region's music culture of that time (Shown in Figure 6).



Figure 6: Mural paintings of the Isan Culture Group along the Mekong River in Nakhon Phanom

The Isan Culture Group along the Mekong River in Loei consists of people from Loei Province, located in the upper Isan region in the northwest, adjacent to Laos. This group, known as the Tai Loei, has social and cultural ties with Laos, which is evident in their accent, similar to that of people in Xayaburi and Luang Prabang provinces in Laos. The relationship between the Lao people and the Tai Loei has a long history, with the Mekong River serving as a key communication route. Among the temples in this area, only Wat Pho Chai in Ban Na Phueng, Na Haeo District features musical instruments in its murals, Surin (2021).

Wat Pho Chai features murals on all four interior walls of the temple, as well as on the exterior of the temple on the western side. The murals inside the temple were painted during the reign of King Rama IV, with a recorded date of 1852 for the interior murals. The exterior mural was painted later, in 1916. The interior murals were created by Khun Phrom, a Laotian craftsman who settled in the village. These murals reflect the work of a local scholar-level painter with a deep understanding of his society. He skillfully integrated the content and style of the paintings with the people and local Tai Loei culture, resulting in a work of remarkable beauty. The exterior murals, on the other hand, highlight the country's modernity at that time (Singyabuth, 2017). The depiction of musical instruments, such as the *ranat*, *kong wong*, *pi*, *khlu*, *saw samsai*, *krachappi*, *taphon*, *klong that*, and *thon* in the murals reflects the influence of music. The murals imitate the musical composition typical of the Piphat band, which was popular in the central region. These instruments evidence the influence of central music on Isan society. The period and craftsmanship of the murals at Wat Pho Chai showcase a blend of Lanxang culture and Bangkok influences. At that time, both sides of the Mekong River were still under Thai control, before the crisis of Rattanakosin era (R.E.) 112, when France began seizing territory on the left bank of the Mekong River and the area of Xayaburi in Laos. The murals also feature the *pin pia*, a musical instrument from Lanna culture, illustrating the influence of Lanna music on the Isan region during that period. Na Haeo District, now a border area between Thailand and Laos, also borders Uttaradit Province and has routes connecting it to Phrae and Nan Provinces. As a result, the influence of Lanna music culture was able to spread to this area relatively easily (Shown in Figure 7).

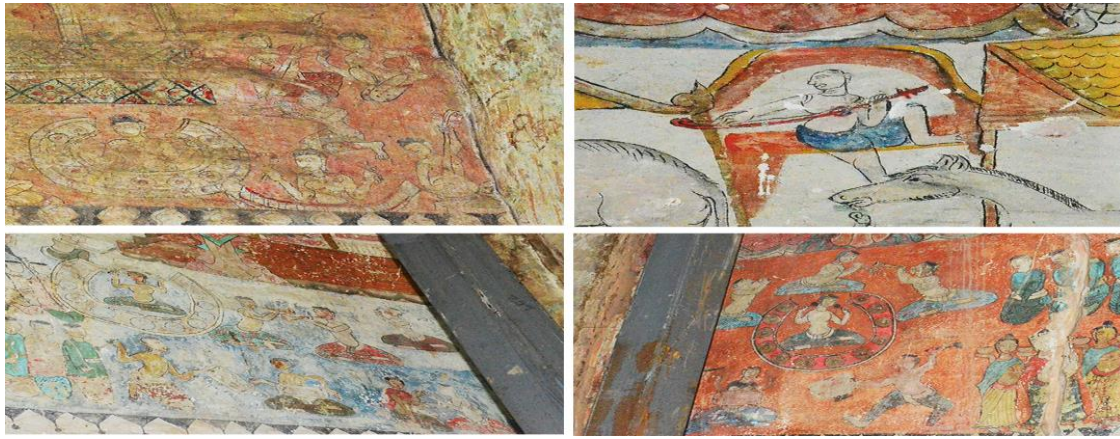


Figure 7: Mural paintings of the Isan Culture Group along the Mekong River in Loei Province

DISCUSSION

The study of musical instruments depicted in the murals of the Isan region indicates a varied mix of cultural, historical, and artistic influences that present the depiction of musical traditions in the region's temples. The diversity of instruments represented is one of the key findings, which spans both indigenous and foreign influences, and reflects the complex history of cultural exchange in Southeast Asia. Instruments such as the Khaen, Saw Bang, Phin, and various percussion instruments like the Ranat and Kong Wong are frequently depicted, focusing on the deep-rooted presence of these instruments in Isan's cultural identity. These musical instruments usually appear together with Buddhist literary and Jataka tales, concentrating on the role of music in religious rituals and also as a key element of everyday life in Isan communities. The murals examined in this study can be classified into distinct cultural groups, each influenced by various social, political, and geographic factors, such as the Thai-Korat Joint Culture Group murals found at Wat Na Phra that show musical traditions associated with royal and religious ceremonies, reflecting the accessibility of this region to the central region of Thailand and its adaptation of Rattanakosin patterns. The Isan Culture Group of the Central Chi River Basin murals define strong Lan Xang cultural influences, specifically in the depiction of instruments like the Khaen and Phin, demonstrating the historical migration and settlement patterns of Laos people in this region. A significant influence in the murals is the influence of regional politics and migration patterns on musical traditions. The murals in the Mun River Basin, especially in Ubon Ratchathani Province, show the mixing of Bangkok-centric cultural elements with local Isan traditions, influenced by the movement of nobility and monks who traveled to study in the Siamese capital. Moreover, the murals in the Mekong region, specifically at Wat Phutthasima and Wat Si Chomchuen, reflect cross-border cultural exchanges, incorporating both Isan folk and Rattanakosin elements. The depiction of musical instruments in these murals also has a deep relationship to the artists and their background and the wider socio-political context of the time. Many murals were created by professional craftsmen or monks with knowledge of central Thailand and Laos traditions, mixing styles to create a distinctive artistic expression. For example, the royal influence in Wat Na Phra's murals is evident in the formal, detailed description of musical instruments typically associated with palace ceremonies. However, in temples such as Wat Thung Si Mueang, a mix of central Siamese influences with Lan Xang traditions is visible, showing the facility with which musical culture has adapted to appreciate both royal and local contexts. This study also shows the importance of music in both sacred and temporal contexts, as seen in the depiction of funeral processions, royal ceremonies, and local festivities. Instruments such as the Pi-Phat in the central region and the Mor Lam performances in Isan villages show that music serves as a form of entertainment and is also an integral component of cultural identity, and mutual unity of community.

CONCLUSION

A total of 25 musical instruments are depicted in the murals of the Isan region. These include the Khaen, Saw Bang, Phin, Klong Tum, Klong Yao, Pi, Khlui, Ranat, Kong Wong, Klong Tat, Klong Song Na, Taphon, Saw U, Krachappi, Kong, Ching, Chap, Trae Ngon, Klong Yai, Saw Samsai, Thon, Phin Pia, Bell, Clarinet, and Tuba. The depiction of these instruments reflects a blend of influences from other cultures that merged with local music traditions, evolving into what is now recognized as Thai music culture. This cultural heritage has been passed down and developed through generations, as evidenced by the musical instruments depicted in the murals of all 26 temples. The murals illustrate how the integration of cultures from both centers of power and local traditions shaped the musical landscape of the Isan region. They highlight the influence of Lanxang culture, local practices, and regional conditions, providing insights into the social, cultural, political, and administrative contexts of the Isan people. Through the experiences of the painters, these murals capture musical narratives that reflect the diverse cultural stories of all five cultural groups.

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