



The Evolution of Thai Folklore and Oral Traditions: Preserving Narratives in a Modernized Society

Sanya Sasong

Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Chiang Mai, Thailand
✉: suriyasuriyong@hotmail.com (Corresponding Email)

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Abstract: This paper examines the evolution of Thai folklore and oral traditions, focusing on the impact of modernization on the preservation of cultural narratives. Thai folklore, encompassing myths, legends, and moral tales, serves as a vital repository of cultural identity, expressing the values, beliefs, and historical experiences of Thai communities. As modernization advances, traditional narratives face challenges due to the influence of technology, globalization, and shifts in audience engagement. Younger generations, influenced by digital media, are gradually moving away from traditional storytelling, raising concerns about cultural continuity. However, modernization also offers opportunities for revitalizing these traditions. Digital platforms, educational integration, and community initiatives provide new pathways for documenting and sharing folklore, ensuring its relevance and accessibility in contemporary society. By analyzing how Thai folklore adapts to changing contexts, this research underscores the resilience of cultural narratives and highlights the importance of safeguarding intangible heritage. The findings suggest that a balanced approach, combining preservation and adaptation, is essential for maintaining the cultural significance of Thai folklore amidst modern influences.

Keywords: Thai folklore, oral traditions, modernization, cultural preservation, digital storytelling

1. Introduction

Throughout history of humans, folklore and oral traditions are important ways of expressing culture, showing the values, beliefs, and experiences of communities. In Thailand, these stories are very important, as they show the relationship between old customs and the need to modernize. The evolution of Thai folklore represents a rich tapestry woven from both local and external influences, reflecting the vibrancy of its storytelling traditions and the resilience of Thai identity in a rapidly changing society. This essay explores how these narratives are preserved and adapted in contemporary contexts, highlighting their role in sustaining cultural continuity while embracing modern perspectives. Ultimately, understanding the transformation of Thai folklore is essential to grasping the intricate relationship between tradition and modernity, as well as the enduring significance of these stories in shaping national identity and fostering community ties in present-day Thailand. To fully understand Thai folklore and oral traditions, it is important to look into their basic traits and roles in society. Broadly, Thai folklore includes a variety of stories shared through spoken language, such as



myths, legends, and moral tales that represent the values and beliefs of the Thai people. These stories do not just entertain; they also help preserve culture, capturing the shared history and identity of different communities. When looking at local oral literature, it becomes clear that these stories change with society, allowing for continuity while also addressing current issues. For example, certain features of Lanna oral Buddhist literature show how governance and community settings shape storytelling practices (Wiset Sorpobdee et al., [2024](#)). Likewise, the ongoing importance of storytelling in shaping views highlights the deep desires and cultural values that connect communities (Ngô Thị Thanh Quý et al., [2023](#)). Thai folklore remains a dynamic cultural force that evolves in tandem with modern society, while also significantly shaping and influencing it.

A better look at folklore shows how it helps create cultural identity. In places like Northeast Thailand, keeping traditional art forms, like Hastilinga funeral art, shows that these stories are not just spiritual but also show social changes and history. As noted, Hastilinga funeral art has changed into detailed designs that reflect wider socio-religious shifts (Prayoot Sarrang et al., [2024](#)). This change shows why folklore is important for shared memory and identity, which matters more in a globalized world. Likewise, in Jiangxi, how folk dance has changed shows the mix of tradition and modern life. The evolution of Jiangxi folk dance exemplifies how folklore serves as a community's heritage, linking individuals to their cultural roots while addressing contemporary challenges. This dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity highlights the resilience of cultural expressions in adapting to societal changes. (Yuan Tang et al., [2024](#)).

As societies change and modernize, traditional stories often get changed a lot, both in how they are told and what they mean. Fast changes from technology and globalization can weaken the deep backgrounds of these tales. For example, keeping Thai folklore alive is hard because younger people are more interested in modern entertainment, which pulls them away from their cultural history. This issue aligns with what has been found in studies of folk literature, where stories are key to cultural connections. Similar to how Vietnamese folk tales show the values and hopes of their people (Ngô Thị Thanh Quý et al., [2023](#)), Thai folklore shows the community's life and gives views on social norms and morals. This tradition faces two big problems: being pushed aside by modern media and being wrongly portrayed in commercial versions. Therefore, protecting traditional stories in a changing world requires focused efforts to spark interest and involve communities in their cultural heritage.

As modernization progresses, keeping Thai folklore and oral traditions alive becomes very important. These stories represent the shared wisdom, values, and history of different groups, acting as a key link to the past that boosts cultural pride and identity. With urban growth and Western influence spreading into daily life, there is a greater chance of losing these narratives, which risks diminishing the unique traits that are part of Thai culture. Additionally, folklore can adapt; it can change through new telling and modern takes while still keeping its essential meaning. This adaptability ensures that traditional stories remain meaningful and engaging, inspiring younger generations to appreciate and uphold their heritage in a rapidly evolving world. In the end, keeping these oral traditions alive not only serves as a form of cultural resistance but also highlights the richness of Thailand's diverse identities in a globalized world (Peter Seitel, [2001](#)).

2. Historical Context of Thai Folklore

The richness of Thai folklore is closely connected to the history of the area, showing the interaction between tradition and modern life. In the past, Thai oral literature was a way to keep culture alive, capturing the beliefs, values, and social rules of different communities. For



example, local oral traditions in Lanna Buddhist stories include many folk tales and rituals that show the context of the community and its ways of governing (Wiset Sorpobdee et al., [2024](#)). These stories, created over many years, not only entertain but also teach, reinforcing cultural identity in a changing world. Additionally, the changes in dance and performance in places like Jiangxi show how folklore changes with political and social changes, making it relevant while attracting new generations (Yuan Tang et al., [2024](#)). Therefore, the history of Thai folklore not only highlights its traditional importance but also emphasizes its vital role in dealing with modern challenges.

Origins and development of Thai folklore

Thai folklore comes from a mix of historical influences and is an important part of the country's cultural history, showing the values, beliefs, and social norms of its people. It started with local practices and religious rites that combined with outside influences like Hinduism and Buddhism, especially during the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods. The collection of stories often highlights moral teachings linked to everyday life and farming, as shown in the Dai-Thai rice sayings that reflect the community's close connection to rice farming (Yongyong Qin et al., [2023](#)). The growth of this folklore has matched changes in society, moving from spoken traditions to written forms as Thailand faced modernization. Just like the two-part evolution of Jiangxi folk dance (Yuan Tang et al., [2024](#)), Thai folklore also faces the challenge of keeping its stories relevant in a fast-changing culture, which emphasizes the importance of ongoing research and recording of these vital tales.

Key themes and motifs in traditional narratives

When looking at old stories, important themes like journey, change, and the fight between good and evil stand out as key parts that highlight community values and cultural identity. The theme of the journey, which often represents personal growth and finding oneself, is common in Thai stories. These tales show characters who travel through both real and symbolic areas to find enlightenment or redemption. This theme often connects with the idea of change, where main characters go through big transformations that show how cultural stories adapt as society changes. Additionally, the clash of good and evil is a basic story structure, teaching moral lessons that speak to people of all ages. These repeating themes not only make the stories richer but also show their importance in today's world, as they capture lasting human experiences that continue to shape cultural identities and moral views in a changing environment.

Role of oral traditions in community bonding

Oral traditions are key in Thai society, serving not only as ways to tell stories but also as important tools for community unity. They help strengthen social ties and identities among different groups. By sharing folklore, myths, and moral stories, these traditions build a common cultural heritage that encourages understanding and togetherness, particularly during times of quick change. When people tell stories, they feel nostalgia and reinforce community values and histories, which are important for keeping social order and cultural strength. This shared storytelling creates a place for dialogue between generations, allowing older people to share their knowledge while younger one helps to keep their cultural identities alive and growing. Therefore, oral traditions do more than keep stories alive; they help create a sense of belonging and unity, which is crucial for communities facing the challenges of modernization and globalization (1993).

Historical events influencing the evolution of folklore





The change of folklore in any culture is closely tied to historical events that influence societal values and identity. In Thai folklore, important events like colonialism, wars, and modernization have changed traditional stories and practices. These changes often introduce new themes and characters that show modern issues, while still keeping ancient wisdom and cultural heritage intact. The oral tradition, which Miguel Méndez highlights in his storytelling methods, shows how important storytelling is for keeping collective memory alive during times of social change. Similarly, oral stories collected from custodians of intangible cultural heritage help to correct biases in written texts and reconstruct historical narratives, ensuring their preservation amidst rapidly changing times (Jiaqi Mei, [2016](#)). By understanding how these historical situations shape folklore, we can better see the changing nature of cultural stories and their role in connecting past and present societies.

3. Impact of Modernization on Thai Folklore

The mix of modernization and Thai folklore shows a notable conflict between keeping traditions and changing them. As Thailand takes in more global trends, old stories may get lost because of newer media and digital tools. Folklore, which used to be passed down through spoken stories in communities, now struggles to stay important as younger people turn to modern entertainment that focuses more on quick and visual content instead of deep storytelling. Yet, this cultural change also brings chances for revival; for example, digital storytelling can spread folklore wider and promote more interactive connections. This opening up of how stories are shared might help people appreciate Thai customs again, making them fit into today's world while still keeping their core cultural meanings. So, while modernization might threaten Thai folklore's purity, it can also drive new ways to preserve it, creating a link between old and new (Peter Seitel, [2001](#)).

Influence of technology on storytelling methods

As technology keeps changing, it has significantly altered how stories are told and how audiences connect with them. Old oral storytelling depended on live shows and community get-togethers, but now it is slowly using digital platforms like podcasts, social media, and interactive apps. This change not only makes it easier for many people to access stories from different places but also changes the storytelling itself; audiences can now take part instead of just watching. The role of visual media, like movies and animations, adds more emotion and urgency to stories, appealing to younger audiences who might not be interested in traditional methods. Still, this use of technology brings up important questions about authenticity and the preservation of culture, as the details in folklore could get lost or misrepresented online. In the end, while technology provides new ways to tell stories, it is essential to find a balance to keep the richness of oral traditions alive.

Changes in audience engagement and participation

The way people engage with Thai folklore and oral traditions has changed a lot due to modernization. In the past, storytelling was not just for entertainment; it was a group activity that created strong bonds among those involved. Now, with digital platforms and social media, these interactions have changed and often lead to less face-to-face involvement that was key in oral storytelling. Current studies show that these shifts are part of larger trends in how stories are experienced, resulting in a more fragmented audience where individual enjoyment often comes before group participation. For instance, while new media can help storytellers reach more people, it may also lessen the richness of shared cultural experiences. Therefore, to maintain the core of Thai narratives, we need fresh methods that combine traditional practices



with modern technologies, which support both engagement and respect for the communal aspect of these stories (Wapanginla Aier et al., [2024](#)) (Emily Coren et al., [2024](#)).

The role of globalization in altering traditional narratives

Globalization has changed how traditional stories are seen, shared, and changed, especially in cultures rich in folklore like Thailand. As cultures exchange more, outside influences often test the strength of local tales, mixing old and new in a way that can weaken original meanings. This situation creates a conflict; globalization gives access to many different stories, which can promote cultural conversation and creativity. On the other hand, it can also turn local tales into products, taking away their cultural background and making them simple entertainment for a global audience. Therefore, while globalization offers chances for stories to be refreshed, it also threatens their preservation, creating a complicated situation while maintaining and adapting these stories needs careful management. It is important to find a balance between accepting global influences and protecting traditional tales for the ongoing growth of Thai folklore today.

Challenges faced by folklore practitioners in a modern context

Today's world has many problems for folklore workers who want to keep their cultural stories alive while everything around them changes fast. A big problem comes from how digital media is everywhere, often pushing widespread stories instead of local ones, which makes unique cultural expressions weaker. As young people spend more time with global media, traditional storytelling becomes less important, putting valuable folklore at risk. Furthermore, many practitioners feel that oral traditions do not matter in our quick-moving society, making them change their techniques but could also hurt the authenticity of their tales. This needs to change can create conflicts between keeping old ways and reaching modern audiences, making it harder for folklorists to share their culture. Therefore, dealing with these issues needs a careful strategy that respects cultural authenticity while allowing for new ideas (Peter Seitel, [2001](#)).

4. Preservation Efforts and Strategies

To keep Thai folklore and oral traditions safe, we need to focus on keeping records and involving the community. Recent studies show that the food practices and cultural backgrounds of the Dai and Thai communities are important for understanding their stories, especially through proverbs that hold farming knowledge and social values (Yongyong Qin et al., [2023](#)). By adding these customs to school programs and cultural activities, young people can learn to value their heritage, which helps them develop their identity in a fast-changing world. Also, traditional performance arts like Nora and Makying show how Thai folklore can change over time, showing how these stories have adapted to historical and cultural shifts (Keiko Kuroda, 2020). This ability to change highlights the need for flexible preservation methods that can protect these traditions while also allowing for new ideas and relevance today.

Community initiatives to revive oral traditions

In today's world, where globalization can threaten local cultures, community projects have become important for bringing back oral traditions. By getting local people involved through storytelling workshops, cultural festivals, and programs that encourage sharing between generations, these projects help renew interest in folk stories that show the community's unique identity. These efforts not only keep storytelling alive but also create active spaces for conversation between young and old, strengthening bonds that might weaken

in the more digital world. Moreover, using modern technology in these projects - like digital storytelling and social media - can greatly increase their audience, drawing in various groups and boosting involvement. Therefore, these community-focused efforts not only protect cultural heritage but also empower people by building a sense of belonging and continuity in a changing society (UNESCO, [2021](#)).

Integration of folklore into educational curricula

Putting folklore into school lessons adds a variety of cultural stories that helps students learn about their backgrounds and encourages them to think critically. By using local myths, legends, and storytelling traditions, teachers can make a lively classroom that goes beyond standard teaching methods, supporting conversation and understanding among different groups of students. This way of teaching not only helps students understand the complexities of their own identities but also encourages them to consider the stories and experiences of others, promoting a more inclusive community. Additionally, by looking at themes in folklore—like morals, community values, and resolving conflicts - students can improve their skills in analysis and interpretation while gaining awareness of human experiences in different situations. In the end, this teaching approach supports today's educational aims of nurturing global citizenship and cultural awareness, important for living in today's society (Kimmo Kosonen et al., [2009](#)).

Use of digital media to document and share narratives

The growth of digital media has changed how stories, especially those based in folklore, are recorded and shared, connecting the past with today. As classic storytelling faces challenges from modernization, digital platforms are key to maintaining these cultural expressions, allowing for broader and more lively participation. For example, the diverse Dai-Thai food culture, which includes special cooking styles and farming knowledge, can now be easily captured and shared online, leading to a greater appreciation from new audiences (Yongyong Qin et al., [2023](#)). Likewise, traditional dance-dramas from Thailand and Malaysia, which were originally passed down orally, are now gaining attention through video platforms and social media, helping them adjust and thrive in modern times (Keiko Kuroda, [2020](#)). Therefore, the digital world not only protects these stories but also refreshes them by promoting community engagement and cultural sharing. Through these new methods, the core of folklore is kept alive, making sure it stays important in a global society.

Collaborations between cultural organizations and local artists

The way cultural groups work with local artists is very important for keeping and updating traditional stories, especially in Thai folklore. When these partnerships happen, cultural institutions improve their programs and make spaces where artists can rethink and retell old tales for today's viewers. This teamwork allows for a varied way to approach folklore, helping artists use their personal backgrounds while staying connected to cultural traditions. These collaborations often result in new forms of expression, like visual arts, performances, or multimedia displays, making folklore meaningful for younger audiences. Additionally, these partnerships can promote community involvement and discussions, leading to a deeper appreciation of cultural heritage and its role in a modern society. In the end, combining support from institutions with local artistic voices is a strong way to keep and adapt folk narratives in a world that is changing quickly.



5. Conclusion

The keeping and change of Thai folklore and oral stories in a quickly changing world show the lively relationship between old traditions and new values. Research on Jiangxi folk dance shows important features of culture, showing that cultural stories change but keep their main essence (Yuan Tang et al., [2024](#)). Also, looking at Lanna oral Buddhist literature shows that these stories do not stay the same; they change to fit today's world, adding different languages and community impacts (Wiset Sorpobdee et al., [2024](#)). So, the main point from these studies is that the life of folklore depends on its ability to connect with modern listeners through change and mixing. Therefore, encouraging appreciation for these changing traditions helps both to keep them alive and make sure they are still important in a diverse society, adding to cultural identity during ongoing change.

When looking at how Thai folklore and oral traditions have changed, a few main points stand out that show how culture is kept alive while also changing. First, the way stories are told in Thailand shows the struggle between keeping old stories alive and changing them to fit today's views. As society becomes more modern, how cultural identity is shown becomes very important. This can be seen in how folklore is adapted in many forms, such as books and movies, which often change traditional stories for current audiences. In addition, technology plays a big role in spreading these stories; digital platforms have made it easier for more people to access folklore. This allows lesser-known voices to share their stories widely, creating a sense of community. Together, these points highlight the complicated link between keeping Thai folklore alive and facing the challenges of a fast-changing society, showing how resilient and adaptable cultural stories can be.

Keeping Thai folklore safe is very important not just for cultural identity but also for connecting different generations that are at risk due to modernization. Traditional performances like Nora and Makyung show animistic and Brahminical heritage, acting as important channels for community wisdom and values, reflecting cultural stories that have changed over many years. If there are no real efforts to keep these oral traditions alive, modern society could lose touch with the deep history that forms national identity. The ongoing issues seen with Ravana Chhaya highlight the need for institutional support, such as museums that can offer both preservation methods and public awareness programs (Jignesh Das et al., [2021](#)). By educating and involving people, these folklore traditions can continue to grow, making sure that future generations receive a strong cultural background that shows the complexities of their heritage (Keiko Kuroda, [2020](#)).

With quick globalization and tech growth, it is important that those involved in cultural preservation work to protect the rich fabric of Thai folklore and oral traditions. This task should include not just government agencies and schools but also local groups, artists, and cultural supporters who care about these stories. By working together across different areas, these parties can make sure oral traditions are recorded, revitalized, and included in modern art forms, which helps keep them important in today's society. Community-driven projects, workshops, and learning programs can help pass down knowledge from one generation to another, letting younger people connect with their roots. Additionally, pushing for policy changes that focus on funding cultural preservation is critical for maintaining these efforts over time while also encouraging cultural tourism that honors and promotes traditional stories. This wide-ranging approach will help keep Thai folklore alive and thriving for future years.

Thai folklore has a strong ability to stay alive, dealing with the challenges of modern times while keeping its cultural roots. As globalization spreads into all parts of life, the impact of Western stories and digital media creates a big challenge for traditional storytelling. But instead of giving way to these outside influences, Thai folklore has changed, adding modern



parts while maintaining its core values. Online platforms and social media not only help share these stories but also allow them to be transformed in ways that connect with younger people looking for their cultural identity in fast-changing times. Additionally, community efforts and educational programs are key in sparking new interest in oral traditions, helping people take pride in their cultural heritage. In the end, the lasting quality of Thai folklore shows a lively mix of tradition and new ideas, which helps it stay alive and important in a constantly changing world.

Originality & Body of Knowledge

Originality: This paper offers a distinctive examination of the evolution of Thai folklore and oral traditions, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities posed by modernization. Unlike traditional studies that focus solely on the preservation of folklore, this research highlights the dynamic nature of Thai narratives, exploring how they adapt to contemporary mediums and cultural shifts. By integrating the influence of digital platforms, educational strategies, and community-driven initiatives, the paper provides an innovative framework for balancing preservation with adaptation. The emphasis on leveraging technology to revitalize storytelling while maintaining cultural authenticity underscores the paper's originality in addressing the complexities of cultural continuity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Body of Knowledge: This study significantly contributes to the discourse on cultural heritage by examining the interplay between tradition and modernity in Thai folklore. It advances the understanding of how oral traditions serve as repositories of collective identity and moral values, while also adapting to digital and global influences. By analyzing key themes, historical developments, and the integration of folklore into educational and community contexts, the research underscores the resilience of cultural narratives. Moreover, the focus on collaborative preservation efforts—such as partnerships between cultural organizations and local artists—provides actionable insights for practitioners aiming to sustain folklore in contemporary settings. This comprehensive approach positions the paper as a valuable resource for academics, policymakers, and cultural advocates seeking to safeguard intangible heritage in an era of rapid change.

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Declarations

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Ethical treatment of experimental subjects (animals & human): The research was conducted in compliance with the principles of the Helsinki Declaration regarding human subjects, so formal ethical approval was not required.

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