

Children's Education by folklore in Thailand

Historical background of Education in Thailand

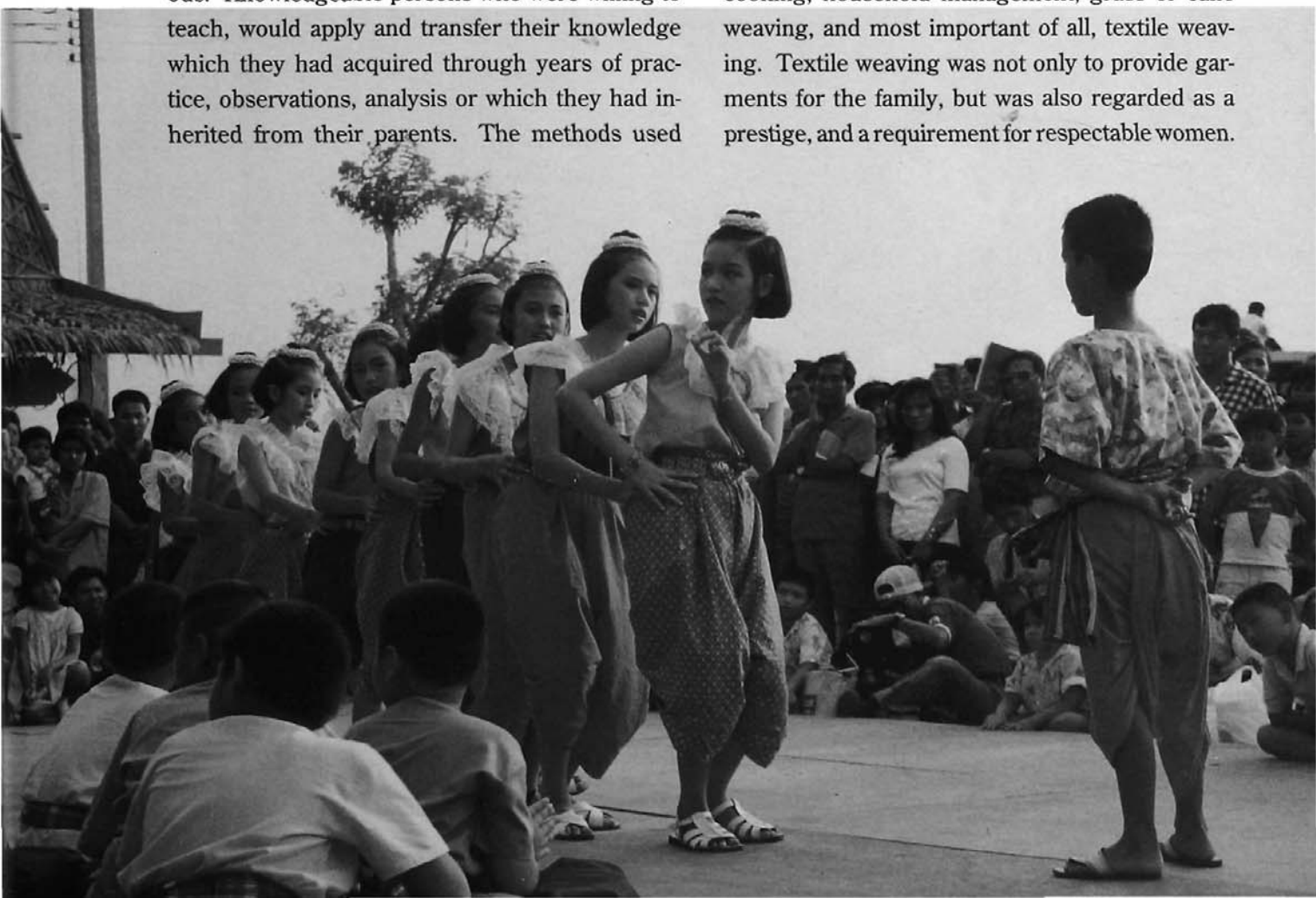
by Khunying Maenmas Chavalit

Education of children in Thailand, before the reformation of its educational system, was under the responsibilities of three institutions; namely the family, the temple, and the King. The education system was reformed in Buddhist Era (B.E.) 2411-2453 (A.D. 1868-1910) during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, who initiated the modernization programme of the country's socio-economy and political infrastructure. Before then, there had been no schools in the modern sense; neither were there a systematically prescribed curriculum and teachers trained in teaching methods. Knowledgeable persons who were willing to teach, would apply and transfer their knowledge which they had acquired through years of practice, observations, analysis or which they had inherited from their parents. The methods used

were oral explanation, demonstration and supervision on the child who was taught to listen, memorise and practice. The child was also expected to ask questions, although this activity was not much encouraged.

Four activities were required for learning: *Suttee* (listening); *Jitta* (thinking); *Pucha* (inquiring), and *Likhit* (writing).

The subjects taught were mainly spiritual, vocational and literary. Girls were given instructions at home, by the mother, the grandmother or female adult relatives. They learned etiquette, cooking, household management, grass or cane weaving, and most important of all, textile weaving. Textile weaving was not only to provide garments for the family, but was also regarded as a prestige, and a requirement for respectable women.





As for religious learning, they were taught by elders in the family as well as by Buddhist monks. During the Buddhist sacred days and festivals, children accompanied their elders to the temple and listened to the preaching of the monk. Daily, at home, they were taught to make merit by getting up early in the morning to prepare food for the monk, and in the evening before going to bed, they would recite the Buddha's teachings, especially the Five *Sila*, or precepts which they were expected to observe strictly. Prescribed education for girls, as being understood by the society, was in the spheres of religions, respectability, obedience, house-hold management skills (which to an extent include property management, arts and crafts, in particular textile weaving). In many parts of Thailand, girls were also expected to be economically self-reliant. This had been observed by a number of foreign visitors to Thailand in the past.

Daughters of the noble or courtier family, after a few years of training at home, would also be sent to the queen, the ladies in the court or the female royalties to learn the more refined arts or engage in higher literary activities such as writing poetry, complicated flower arrange-

ment, embroidery, etc.. This training is reflected in the education of Lady Nopamas of the Sukhotai court (13th Century A.D.), as described in the book entitled "Nang Nopamas".

As for boys, their education was mainly provided by the temple. After their early age, a boy of about 6-7 years would be sent to the temple, and some of



them would stay in the temple until they finished the required training. Common subjects for boys and girls are etiquette and religious learning. Boys also learned arts and crafts from the temple as well as from their family or elders. For religion, boys were taught deeper knowledge and were required to observe more strictly the precepts and other disciplines, including grammar, reading and writing of the Thai language. They began with learning the alphabets - in both Thai and Pali scripts - which girls were normally not allowed to learn. The boys were also taught other skills and knowledge in which each particular

temple was specialised such as building, carving, gilding, mother-of-pearl inlaiding, medicine, astrology and astronomy. The knowledge and skills acquired would be applied for earning a living.

In the past, the temple was actually a community resource centre for education of boys. Similar to girls, the sons of noble family were also sent to the court to obtain knowledge required for royal and state services.

The invention of Thai alphabets

Concerning the encoding of information for preservation and dissemination of knowledge, the King had a significant role to play. King Ramkhamhaeng the Great invented the Thai script in B.E. 1826 (1383 A.D.). Oral history began to be recorded in written words, even though during those time religious text were actually written in the Pali language and ancient Khom script. It took a few hundred years for the Thai language and script to be fully used for religious purposes, and especially to record Thai folklore for education. Nevertheless, Thai folklore has been, since the past, one of the resources for education of children.

The role of folklore in children's education

Before and even after the education reform, folklore has had a great role to play in Thai children's education. Folklore such as nursery rhymes, lullabies, folk tales, legend, myth, proverbs, sayings, beliefs, religious rites and festivals etc. have been parts of everyday life. A



child in Thailand would normally be brought up in an environment containing these elements of folklore.

Naturally, after the education reform, formal schools were established. The national education plan was formulated to meet changes in society, and systematic knowledge were imported to broaden the child's world view. Nevertheless, certain types of folklore were selected and adapted for inclusion in classroom teaching.

In the past, folklore in general were meant to impart some knowledge, to stimulate thinking and to maintain self-control,

in a word to teach directly or indirectly through, for example, lullabies and rhymes to console children.

The lullaby and nursery rhyme

The direct function of the lullaby is to soothe children to sleep. The benefits of sleeping well contribute significantly to children's health and growth. Sang in soft and smooth melody, the Thai lullaby consists of words which express love and care. This helps a child to feel secure, and indirectly it fosters self-confidence which is necessary for learning. The baby learns to appreciate melodious sound and to recognise words. Modern child psychologists and specialists, in promoting reading, suggest that, even at very early age, the baby should be introduced to words which are necessary for developing reading skill even before the child goes to school.

Another characteristic of Thai lullabies is that they contain words about nature. The opening line, in general, consists of words about flowers, birds of different kinds, trees, stars and the moon. Some are about folk tales, description of places and the parents' occupation. In the old days, it was quite customary

to put a 3 or 4 years-old child in the cradle, and sing lullabies to ease them into the state of sleepfulness. By repeatedly singing to them, the child therefore, more or less, learn some facts about the environment in which he or she is being brought up.

A number of the Thai lullabies for babies or small children contain ideas and teachings which are actually not at all understood by children. Thai folklorists such as Pongpan Maneeratna, Pinyo Jittam, and Kingkaew Attakorn pointed out that these lullabies are meant for adults i.e. elder sisters or young mothers who sung the lullabies to teach themselves, and to express their own frustration or hope.

The intention to use lullaby for education purposes, perhaps, took place in the reign of King Rama III (B.E. 2367-2393 A.D. 1824-1850) when His Majesty, desirous of educating his people, ordered that all masters of knowledge, technical and artistic skills, including those knowledgeable in folklore, transferred their knowledge. This was done by inscribing their knowledge on stone slabs fixed to the pillars and window panels of the temple and balconies of Wat Phra Chetupon (annexed to the Royal Palace). In those days, the temples were still the centres of

learning, and the majority of the Thai people were illiterate. The King ordered that pictorial presentation should be made along with written words. Thus we have a few lullabies, particularly the popular ones, such as *Chau Khun Thong* (the talking myna), and *Ching Cho* (a mysterious animal), inscribed with illustrations so that children could see and read them.

scholars, Pay Sergeant Mora and Prince Damrong Rajanubhab.

In the year B.E. 2427 (1884 A.D.) Pay Sergeant Mora began to collect nursery rhymes for the purposes of rewriting and adapting them to stimulate children's interest. He took a few initial lines from the nursery rhymes and added stories which were his own creation, in order

1921). The purpose then was mainly to preserve them, with copies distributed to schools. Later, after having considered that some of the verses did not contain substantial content suitable for teaching children, he arranged to have them rewritten, using words and a systematic style of writing Thai poetry, and added moral lessons. These were put together in one book



Other types of folklore such as folk tales, proverbs, rites and festivals, riddles, history, medical treatises, and classical literature were also engraved on stone slabs in Wat Phra Chetupon.

It should also be mentioned here that the credit of transferring the lullabies and nursery rhymes from oral tradition into modern book form for the first time should be given to two

to entertain and teach children. The title of his book is "*Yawaphot* - Words for Children".

Prince Damrong Rajanubhab undertook the task of collecting nursery rhymes from all over Thailand during his chairmanship of the National Library Board. After verifying some of them, he had the rhymes printed in a book in B.E. 2464 (A.D.

entitled "*Doksoi Subhasit* - Verses on Proverbs". Doksoi is one of the versification style which can be easily remembered by children. For example, the original rhyme called "Black Crow" which contains some lines about catching young birds was changed into "Friendly Crow" to indicate the crow's selflessness. This book was used for the first time in teaching orphans in the

newly established school for orphans. It is now included in the elementary school list of supplementary reading materials.

To foster aesthetic appreciation of the nursery rhymes, musical melodies were arranged



for the verses to be sung by school children.

Nowadays, nursery rhymes are disappearing. Cradles are hardly used for babies to sleep in, and westernised songs from radio-broadcasting replace lullabies. Surveys and collection of folk rhymes are conducted by universities and teachers' training colleges which offer courses in folklore studies. As there is quite a large collection, attempts are being made to revive the application of nursery rhymes for bringing up children. For example, the Institute of Language and Culture, Mahidol University organises a television

programme and contest for nursery rhyme singing. Selected rhymes are tape-recorded for wider dissemination.

Folktales

Folktales, on the other hand, have been much more used for education purposes, in particular in imparting moral values, religious concepts and worldly wisdom. They have been collected, verified, and rewritten in prose, verse and drama forms. Some are prescribed as school textbooks or supplementary reading materials for the study of Thai language. King Rama

II rewrote the folktale *Krai-Thong* into drama form, which proves to be very popular to date.



Recently, in order to stimulate children's interest in folktales, the Office of the National Commission for Culture organised a contest on story-telling. It was aimed at helping children to make their own judgment for the selection of tales,

and to practise their language skills in verbal expression and communication. On the use of folktales to promote aesthetic skills and creativity, children are also instructed to dramatise the tales as well. Contests among schools for story-telling and dramatisation have been organised occasionally.

In promoting reading habit and introducing children to the contents of subjects prescribed in the primary and secondary school curriculum, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, conducts workshops for school teachers on techniques of utilising folktales to teach such subjects as history, arts skills, moral values, environment and natural studies, etc.. Folktales can be integrated into the teaching of many subjects. In connection with teaching arts skills, and encouraging creativity, folktales have also been used as themes for drawing, painting, poetry writing and dramatisation.

Folk games

Folk games and sports have been given consideration for use in physical education. The Department of Physical Education, Ministry of Education, collected folk games and sports, and pub-

lished them in book form (to be used as manuals by physical education teachers). Schools nationwide conduct training in some folk games and sports such as *Ta Kraw* (cane woven ball), Thai boxing, etc. as compulsory or selected subjects.

Rites and rituals

Religious rites and rituals have been living forces which unite the community members together, and provide opportunities for school children to be involved in extra-curricula activities. They work together to study the significance of rites and rituals as observed and practiced; to use their artistic creativity and skills to make displays of carved figures; and to make flower arrangements for temple

decorations, for floats on land and in the river and so on. The mass media contribute by giving much publicity to these activities.

One traditional rite that has been observed regularly in school is that of paying homage to teachers. On a Thursday at the beginning of each education year (believed to be the day of the *Kuru* god teacher), children bring flowers to pay homage to their teachers during the school assembly. Special kinds of flowers are presented, i.e. the needle flower (to signify that they should be as clever, as sharp and keen as needles), egg-plant flowers and special kind of grass which grows very quickly, and signify rapid spiritual and physical development. Decades ago,

14 January was proclaimed as the National Teachers' Day when celebration was organised on a national scale.

In conclusion, it can be said that folklore in Thailand has long been used for children's education, both formally and informally, in order to promote language skills, aesthetic appreciation and creativity in physical, civic and spiritual development. Through activities in connection with folklore, children also learn to work together, to share experiences and to build up community conscience. ■

Sources of information

Anek Nawiggamun. **Songs outside this century.**

The role of CIOFF in children's education by folklore

In pursuance of Unesco's Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, The Council International des Organizations de Festivals de Folklore et d'Arts Traditionels-CIOFF has obliged itself to "design and introduce into both formal and out-of-school curricula the teaching and study of folklore in the appropriate manner, laying particular emphasis on reports for folklore in the widest sense of the term..." Mr. Jerzy Chmiel, President of Polish



Section CIOFF pointed out, in his inaugural speech (delivered at the International Conference on Children's Education by Folklore, held at Zielona Góra, Poland, 9-14 August 1993). He informed the Conference that in order to fulfill the Recommendation, the CIOFF General Assembly in 1992 endorsed the CIOFF Executive Board to :

1. prepare a project of general CIOFF activity all over the world in the domain of children's education by folklore, taking into account the existing

(Phleng Nok Satawat). 3rd printing. Bangkok: Muang Buran, B.E. 2527 (1984 A.D.), 791 P. (in Thai).
Song for children p. 509-532.

Anuman Rajadhon, Phya.
Essays on Thai folklore.
Bangkok: Thai Inter-Religious Commission for Development and Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation, 1988, 421 P.

Charuwan Thammawat.
Northeastern folklore.
(Khati Chauban I-san).
Mahasarakm: Centre for I-san Arts and Culture, Sri Nakhairindrawiro University, n.d., 153 p. (in Thai).

Kingkaew Atthakorn. **Study of folklore.** (Khatichon Wittaya). Bangkok: Department of Teachers' Training,

Supervisory Unit, B.E. 2519 (1976 A.D.), 366 p.

Ministry of Education, Thailand. **100 years of the Ministry of Education.** (Roi Pee Krasuang Suksatikarn). Bangkok: the Ministry of Education, B.E. 2535 (1992 A.D.), 358 p. (in Thai).

Ministry of Education. **Primary education curriculum 1972 revised 1990.** (Lak Soot Prathom Suksa B.E. 2521, Prabprung B.E. 2533). Bangkok: Ministry of Education, B.E. 2534 (1991 A.D.), 150 p. (in Thai)

Pongpan Maneeratna. **Anthropology and folklore study.** (Manut Witaya Karn Suksa Kati Chauban). Bangkok: Thammasat Univer-

sity Press. B.E. 2525 (1982 A.D.), 233 p. (in Thai)

Prapat Trinarong.
"Chesabodin-Krommuen-Phrabat Somdet Phra Nang Klau Chau Yu Hua, the 3rd reign of Chakri Dynasty". In Thai Encyclopedia (Saranukrom Thai), vol. 9, B.E. 2512-13, p. 5542-5570.

Sumamal Ruangdet.
Phanomtuan folksong.
(Phleng Puenmuang Chak Phanomtuan). Bangkok: Department of Teachers Training, Supervisory Unit, B.E. 2518 (1975 A.D.), 236 p. (in Thai)

Toth, Marian Davies. **Tales from Thailand : folklore, culture and history.** 2nd printing, Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1982, 183 p.

experiences of this process in different countries, and the activity of existing children's folklore festivals;

2. encourage the National Sections to stimulate children's groups to base their stage presentations on the children's folk games and plays, at a level according to the children's abilities and perception.

The First International Conference on Children's Education by Folklore deliberated on 5 main topics: 1) programmes of aesthetic education of chil-

dren in the domain of folklore and traditional culture; 2) methodology for working with children in the educational process connected with culture; 3) problems of selecting repertoire suitable for children and youth folk group and their manner of presentation; 4) detailed programmes and accompanying activities during the presentation of children's folklore festivals; 5) possibilities of incorporating complementary programmes of activities, especially for children, at the CIOFF international folklore festivals.

...continue on Page 25

...continue from Page 24

Notes

The following are excerpts and resumes taken from Unesco and WIPO documents pertaining to folklore

Definition of terms

According to the Unesco paper on "Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore", which has been adopted by the General Conference at its 25th Session, Paris, 15 November 1989, *folklore* is defined as "— the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts."

Generally speaking, folklore characteristics are expressions of the folk or the common people, and

the ethnic groups, as contrast to those of sophisticated classes, or royalties. Its creators are mostly anonymous, and it is also ethnic heritage, handed down from generations to generations, orally or by means of demonstration and imitation. Only recently, to a certain extent, has it been recorded by modern methods. Naturally, it belongs to the community, or the nation where it was generated. According to legal authorities on copyrights, folkloric rights, in particular its artistic aspects, are facing threats of being infringed upon for commercial purposes; this is due also partly to its being not documented properly.

Joint Unesco and WIPO's (World Intellectual Property Organisation) Model Provision for the National Laws on the Protection of Expression of Folklore, (1983) provides definition of folklore arts as productions consisting of characteristic elements of the traditional artistic heritage developed and maintained by a community of (name the country) or by individuals, reflecting the traditional artistic expectations of such a community, in particular :-

- (i) verbal expressions - such as folk tales, folk poetry, and riddles;
- (ii) musical expressions, such as folk songs and instrumental music;
- (iii) expression by action, such as folk dances, plays, and artistic forms or rituals; whether or not reduced to a material form; and
- (iv) tangible expressions, such as:
 - (a) Production of folk art, in particular, drawings, paintings, carvings, sculptures, pottery, terracotta, mosaic, woodwork, metalworks, jewellery, basket weaving, needlework, textiles, carpets, costumes;



- (b) musical instruments;
- (c) architectural forms.

Folkloric arts have 3 different aspects, at present:

1. Those originated and developed at village, or ethnic group level, without outside influence. They are made for everyday use, for decoration and religious ceremonies and ritual purposes; for example, woven basket, hand-made textiles, pottery,

decorative wood carving.

2. Those originated and developed at town or city level, having some outside influence, because of the contact with outside community,



and yet within the same cultural or linguistic pattern.

3. Those originated and developed at country level, with various outside influence, within and outside community of similar geographic and cultural environment, sometimes acquired by the country people, sometimes politically imposed upon them.

The needs to safeguard folkloric arts

Folkloric arts are an integral part of ethnic, communal and national cultural heritage, and intellectual properties which constitute the basic elements of civilization, and national identity.

On a worldwide scale, folklore is also considered by the world community, through Unesco, as "part of the universal heritage of humanity and that it is a powerful means of bringing together different peoples and social groups and of asserting their cultural identity. It is important for the social, economic and cultural fields, and has a great role in the history of the people, and its place in contemporary culture.

However, because of its traditional forms, particularly the oral tradition, it faces the danger of being forgotten or transformed, or exploited for commercial purposes by business enterprises, within and outside the country without rendering benefits to originators, who, in most cases, are anonymous and cannot be identified. It also happens that tangible cultural objects have been subjected to illicit traffic, and thus impoverishing the national cultural heritage.

It is therefore necessary to safeguard folklore against threats, to promote appreciation and to take actions for sustainable preservation and development for contemporary and future generations.



The Unesco Recommendation of the Safeguard of Traditional Culture and Folklore, adopted by the General Conference at its twenty-fifth session, Paris, 15 November 1989 includes suggestions to be undertaken by Member States on:-

a. *Conservation of folklore* by documentation of folk tradition and its objects; establishment of national archives to properly collect, store and make available; establishment of a central national archive function for services purpose; creation of museums or folklore sections at existing museums where traditional and popular culture can be exhibited and training of personnel concerned with the conservation of folklore, from physical conservation to analytic work.

b. *Preservation of folk traditions* and support for those who are the transmitters in the communities which produce them; designing and introducing in school curricula the teaching and study of folklore; protection of the right of access of various cultural communities to their own folklore

by supporting their work in the fields of documentation, archiving, research etc., as well as in the practice of tradition.

c. *Dissemination of folklore* in order to draw the attention of the people to the importance of folklore as an ingredient of cultural identity, and to safeguard the integrity of the tradition. Among other activities, Member States are recommended to encourage the organisations of national, regional and international events, symposia, workshops, training courses, congresses, etc., and support the dissemination and publication of their materials, papers and other results; broader coverage of folklore materials in national and regional press, and other mass media; facilitation of meetings and exchanges between individuals and institutions concerned with folklore, and encouragement of the international scientific community, and ethnic groups, by ensuring proper approach to and respect for traditional cultures.



Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia introduces many traditional forms of theatre that are not widely known outside their countries of origin. Edited by Dr Chua Soo Pong, Currently the Director of the Chinese Opera Institute in Singapore, the book discusses how traditional forms of theatre should be revitalised in the rapidly changing socio-economic environments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Traditional Theatre in Southeast Asia (US\$ 10 excluding postage cost) can be obtained from:

Regional Centre for Archaeology
and Fine Arts
SPAFA
81/1 Sri Ayutthaya Road
Samsen, Theves
Bangkok 10300, Thailand
Tel : (66-2) 2804022-9
Fax : (66-2) 2804030
Email : spafa@ksc.th.com

