

## The Transmission Process of Phin Pia: A Case Study of Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the restoration and transmission of the Phin Pia, a traditional Lanna musical instrument from Northern Thailand, with an emphasis on Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas. Commencing in 2001, Pipatpong implemented individualized oral teaching techniques, which subsequently progressed into systematic education, creating a Phin Pia textbook and establishing a distinctive notation system. His endeavors broadened access to Phin Pia education throughout Thailand via community initiatives, universities, and public exhibitions. Digital media—specifically CD recordings, YouTube videos, and online tutorials—significantly contributed to the preservation and global promotion of the Phin Pia. The formation of the Phin Pia Legend Continuation Club enhanced cultural outreach and historical education. This study emphasizes the role of individual commitment, community involvement, and contemporary educational resources in effectively safeguarding and conveying intangible cultural heritage across generations and national boundaries.

**Key words:** Phin Pia, Thai Music, Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas, Music Transmission

### INTRODUCTION

The Phin Pia, a traditional stringed instrument from Northern Thailand, possesses profound historical and cultural importance within the musical legacy of the Lanna Kingdom. The instrument, once related to the royal court of Chiang Mai, likely served a ceremonial or aristocratic purpose; throughout the ages, it has become firmly identified with folk customs, especially those centered on romance and serenading. Notwithstanding its esteemed reputation, the practice of Phin Pia playing saw a significant decrease by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, nearing extinction by the 1960s (McGraw, 2007; Ansvananda et al., 2024; Seeyo et al., 2023). This loss was exacerbated by changing sociopolitical circumstances, notably the annexation of Lanna by Siam in 1896 and the ensuing cultural assimilation initiatives.

The Phin Pia is progressively acknowledged as an emblem of Northern Thai identity, esteemed for its distinctive tonal characteristics and connection to broader Southeast Asian musical traditions. The Phin Pia, structurally akin to ancient stick zithers prevalent across Asia, illustrates a historical trajectory marked by millennia of regional interchange and specific modification (Pitupumnak, 2018; Sankam-ai & Srisombut, 2015). Contemporary research has reassessed its importance, with several specialists suggesting that the instrument predates the introduction of Buddhism in the area. Initiatives to rejuvenate the Phin Pia tradition have become essential for preserving Thailand's intangible cultural heritage (Wannachaiyakul et al., 2022).

Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas, a musician, scholar, and educator, is central to this rebirth, significantly contributing to the dissemination of Phin Pia knowledge. Since commencing his studies of the instrument in 1998 under the guidance of acclaimed folk artists, Pipatpong has dedicated over twenty years to the preservation and dissemination of this endangered art form (Akins & Binson, 2011). His work illustrates the critical importance of individual agency in cultural preservation, serving as a conduit between historical traditions and future generations.

The article investigates the transmission process of Phin Pia through the case study of Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas, investigating how his educational techniques, community involvement, and personal commitment have facilitated the resuscitation of Phin Pia in Northern Thailand. The study highlights how traditional music may be actively protected, altered, and enjoyed within the wider framework of cultural sustainability.

### Research Objective

- To investigate the transmission process of the Phin Pia through a case study of Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### General Knowledge about the History of Phin Pia

The Phin Pia, a traditional stringed instrument from Northern Thailand, is frequently likened to Cambodia's Kse Diev

because of its structural resemblances and shared historical contexts. Cambodian academics, like Keo Narom and Sam-Ang Sam, have comprehensively analyzed the Kse Diev, connecting its iconography to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century. Notwithstanding these endeavors, international study has predominantly neglected this instrument, and discussions continue over its precise origins. Cambodian artists assert that the Kse Diev is a uniquely Khmer instrument; nevertheless, some researchers propose that the monochord zither may have evolved in Southeast Asia, influenced by areas such as Java or India (Grant, 2016; Dyer, 2018). The phonetic resemblances between Khmer and Thai nomenclature for the instrument suggest a shared cultural history or historical appropriation.

Historical records and regional transmission indicate a significant connection between the Kse Diev and Thailand's Phin Pia. Musicians and researchers from Cambodia and Thailand, such as Professor Titipol Kanteewong and Phin Pia performer Ai Boy, contend that the Phin Pia may have originated in Cambodia before evolving in Thailand. The compelled relocation of Khmer musicians to Siam after the collapse of Angkor in 1431, as observed by Gerald Dyck, may have facilitated the spread of associated instruments such as the pin nam tao and Phin Pia. Linguistic borrowings, such as the Khmer phrase "Kse Diev," which includes the Thai word for "one," underscore cultural interactions and common musical terminology between the two regions (Dyck, 1975; Sangaroon et al., 2022).

The examination of the Phin Pia in Thailand has predominantly concentrated on its significance within Lanna culture, with less scholarship investigating it from a musicological standpoint. Researchers such as Kanyarat Promwiset, Songkrot Thongkham, and Gerald Dyck have documented the rebirth and cultural significance of the instrument in Northern Thailand. Dyck's contributions in the 1970s, together with Prasit Liawsiripong's historical investigations of individuals like Mr. Paeng Noja, have been essential in safeguarding the oral and visual heritage of the Phin Pia. Western researchers typically associate the instrument's genesis with Cambodian customs. However, Thai academics frequently contextualize it within the wider cultural narrative of Lanna history (Dyer, 2017). The history of Phin Pia is a domain of abundant cross-cultural importance. However, it needs further musicological exploration.

### **General Knowledge about the Shape and Performance Techniques of Phin Pia**

The Phin Pia is a monochord or multi-stringed stick zither historically performed in Northern Thailand, especially in the Lanna area. A fundamental element of the instrument's construction is using a gourd resonator, affixed to the wooden stick and rubbed against the player's chest to enhance sound amplification and regulate tonal dynamics. This construction and performance configuration is analogous to other Southeast Asian instruments, including Cambodia's Kse Diev and India's Tuila. Researchers, including De Hen, McGraw, and Babiracki, have examined these instruments across several cultures, highlighting commonalities

and regional distinctions in materials and methodologies (Seekhunlio et al., 2023; Rhodes, 2021). In contrast to the Phin Pia, the Tuila is constructed from bamboo and utilizes thread strings, whereas the Phin Pia often incorporates metal strings and a more intricate tuning system.

Performance skills for the Phin Pia are exceptionally specialized, necessitating years of rigorous preparation. Musicians employ harmonic techniques on the lowest string (pok string), where the right hand generates harmonics as the left hand concurrently dampens, plucks, or embellishes tunes. These approaches reflect those employed in the Kse Diev and Tuila, demonstrating a common musical lineage in the region. Thai academics, including Ratchawit Musikarun, Theeraphong Chalad, and Boontarika Kongphet, have meticulously investigated these performance techniques, analyzing the functions of various strings and the modifications of both the two-string and four-string variants of the instrument. Educators like Rakkiat Panyayot have also played a role in recording and transmitting these practices at schools like Chiang Mai College of Dramatic Arts (Grant, 2017; Mamula, 2008).

### **General Knowledge about the Function and Status of Phin Pia**

The Phin Pia, a traditional Lanna musical instrument from Northern Thailand, has traditionally served various purposes, from romance and passionate expression to royal and ceremonial use. The Phin Pia, like the Tuila in India and the Kse Diev in Cambodia, was initially linked with aristocratic or royal ensembles before becoming an important part of ordinary courting traditions. In these traditions, young men used the Phin Pia to serenade ladies, frequently performing shirtless to highlight their musical prowess and physical attraction. However, this romantic role has all but vanished in current times, with just a few elder artists recalling its original context. By the mid-twentieth century, the instrument was nearly extinct due to the collapse of traditional courting customs and changes in cultural conventions (Akins & Binson, 2011).

The Phin Pia is also significant in culture, religion, and literature within the Lanna tradition. Its remarkable craftsmanship, particularly the carved and symbolic animal-shaped heads, exemplifies northern Thai craftsmen's artistic ability. The instrument is inextricably linked to local temples, which have traditionally functioned as keepers of cultural relics and wisdom. The Phin Pia symbolizes passionate desire and emotional depth in literature and folktales, frequently appearing in lyrical poems and ceremonial circumstances. Though it is no longer in widespread use, the Phin Pia is nevertheless a significant cultural icon, reflecting local wisdom, artistic beauty, and the surviving spirit of Lanna history (Volk, 2006). The Phin Pia remains a vehicle of collective memory and identity due to its association with temples and symbolic function in oral traditions.

### **Research Theory**

This study is based on musicological research concepts. It seeks to examine the link between the Phin Pia and its

reciprocal impact on individuals and society across its extensive historical evolution. By examining its development, usage, and cultural relevance, the research aims to gain a thorough knowledge of Phin Pia's significance and diverse function within Northern Thai musical traditions (Sundin, 1984; Okeke, 2020). Ethnomusicology, a subdiscipline of musicology, examines the intricate interplay between music and human culture. The objective is to comprehend musical practices within their distinct cultural settings, especially by fieldwork and direct interaction with communities. Ethnomusicological research aims to elucidate music's fundamental principles, analyzing its evolution, role, and metamorphosis among various ethnic groups and geographical areas. Ethnomusicology examines actual musical activities and their social contexts, offering insights into music's origins, evolution, flourishing, and adaptation, enhancing the comprehensive knowledge of the overarching patterns and trajectories of human musical expression (Graber & Sumera, 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research approach based on ethnomusicology, concentrating on the transmission, maintenance, and rejuvenation of the Phin Pia, a traditional musical instrument from Northern Thailand. The study focuses on fieldwork, participant observation, interviews, and document analysis to investigate Phin Pia's teaching techniques and cultural relevance, focusing on Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas' contributions. The research examines how the Phin Pia has been taught, changed, and maintained in educational, cultural, and communal settings.

### Data Collection Methods

Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews with Phin Pia practitioners, students, cultural specialists, and the study's central protagonist, Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas. Interviews were semi-structured to provide freedom while maintaining a thematic focus on transmission processes, instructional strategies, and performance practices. Participant observation occurred during Phin Pia classes, workshops, public performances, and cultural festivals in Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and Nan provinces. Fieldnotes, pictures, and audio-visual recordings were employed to capture the learning environment, student participation, and musical content.

### Document and Media Analysis

Secondary data were gathered by analyzing pertinent academic articles, historical records, CD and VCD recordings, YouTube videos, Phin Pia teaching materials, and textbooks created by Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas. These sources supplied information about the instrument's history, stylistic variants, repertory, and the role of media in cultural dissemination.

### Data Analysis

The data were evaluated thematically to uncover recurring themes and patterns in knowledge transmission, performance

tactics, cultural identity, and educational strategies. The findings were analyzed using ethnomusicological theory, which stresses the cultural background of music-making, and cultural transmission theory, which focuses on how knowledge, practices, and values are passed down through generations.

## RESULTS

### The Process of Teaching and Transmission of Phin Pia

#### *The first period*

In 2001, Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas began teaching the Phin Pia to a small group of first-generation students, including two from Chiang Mai College of Dramatic Arts and one from Phrae Province. These students became proficient in the instrument and later contributed to teaching new learners. At the time, instruction was conducted one-on-one through oral tradition and practical demonstration, limited to individuals with a genuine interest. Due to the lack of standardized Phin Pia instruments, antique Phin Pia heads were often sourced from shops and assembled, as high-quality, newly cast Phin Pia components were not yet available (Figure 1).

#### *The second period*

By 2012, the growing number of students created a demand for more Phin Pia instruments, leading to the development of a new casting process for Phin Pia heads. Although the early attempts encountered issues such as fragility and poor sound quality, Ajarn Manop Thamdul Phinit, a Lanna musical instrument shop owner, played a key role in refining the process. After numerous trials and substantial investment, they produced high-quality Phin Pia heads. This advancement enabled Pipatpong's teaching to proceed more efficiently and consistently.

#### *The Third Period*

The third period began in 2003 with sponsorship from the Wat Phra That Doi Suthep Worawihan Foundation in Chiang Mai. This support allowed Pipatpong to teach Phin Pia to



**Figure 1.** First-generation students of Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas  
Source: Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas

youth and interested individuals in the province. That same year, CD recordings of Phin Pia music were produced and gained popularity, sold at tourist attractions like Wat Phra That Doi Suthep and Lanna Music Shop. These recordings included solo performances and collaborations that blended traditional, folk, and international music styles. Live demonstrations at Chiang Mai's Sunday Walking Street also introduced the instrument to Thai and international audiences.

As the instrument gained popularity, Pipatpong realized the need for structured pedagogy. He created the first-ever Phin Pia textbook, compiling historical information, construction details, and playing techniques. He also introduced a new notation system using two to five lines, an innovation unprecedented in Lanna and Thai music traditions.

#### *The fourth period*

Between 2004 and 2008, while studying at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Silpakorn University, Pipatpong continued teaching the Phin Pia. During this time, interest in the instrument grew, especially among university students in Bangkok and northern Thailand. The dissemination of performances across institutions increased awareness and attracted more learners. 95 Business Company Limited also supported this revival by producing CDs of traditional Thai instruments, including the Phin Pia (Figure 2).

In 2008, an animated instructional video was created to demonstrate basic and advanced playing techniques. That same year, Pipatpong had the honor of presenting his Phin Pia work to Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn at Chitralada Palace. Her Royal Highness emphasized the importance of preserving and promoting the Phin Pia, marking a pivotal moment for its revival. Since then, the instrument has attracted interest from both Thai and international students studying in Thailand.

#### *Continued development after 2008*

After 2008, Pipatpong expanded his teaching to multiple locations, including museums in Lamphun, temples in Nan, and various communities in Chiang Mai. He welcomed all students interested in the Phin Pia, offering one-on-one and group instruction. Lessons covered basic and advanced



**Figure 2.** Phin Pia performance at Sirindhorn Anthropology Center

Source: Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas

techniques, with increasing availability of Phin Pia instruments and recorded teaching materials via YouTube and on-line platforms, enabling self-study and personalized learning (Figure 3).

#### **Phin Pia Teaching Methods of Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas**

##### *Fundamental instruction*

Students acquire essential methods, including sound production, using the “Pok” approach. Depending on the student’s commitment and aptitude, this initial step may take weeks or months. Upon mastering sound creation, students advance to basic melodies, starting with the piece Prasat Wai. The objective at this juncture is to establish a robust technical basis and foster enjoyment via consistent advancement.

##### *Intermediate instruction*

During the second phase, students investigate sound manipulation techniques, particularly utilizing the larynx to produce tone changes. They cultivate proficiency in modulating string tension, managing finger pressure, and regulating loudness. Furthermore, students analyze the distinctions of 2- to 5-string Phin Pia models, engage in group performance with classmates, and interchange instruments to augment their learning experience. Collaborative efforts enhance comprehension and proficiency, providing avenues for personal and group song creation.

##### *Enhanced training*

Advanced instruction is intended for individuals with robust basic skills seeking to master complex melodies and methods. Instruction emphasizes harmonics, string articulation, and intricate laryngeal manipulation. Focus is directed towards seamless transitions and emotive performance. At this juncture, pupils are urged to assimilate the artistic philosophy of the Phin Pia—performing not only with proficiency but with heartfelt emotion. Educators emphasize transmitting emotional depth and aesthetic beauty rather than rote



**Figure 3.** Group teaching in a community in nan province

Source: Pipatpong Srikitaornharidas

memory, facilitating pupils’ mastery and creative development (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Students playing the Phin Pia using the first textbook  
Source: Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas



**Figure 5.** Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas’s performance Phin Pia  
Source: Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas

**The Process of Transmission of Phin Pia Compositions**

**On-site transmission**

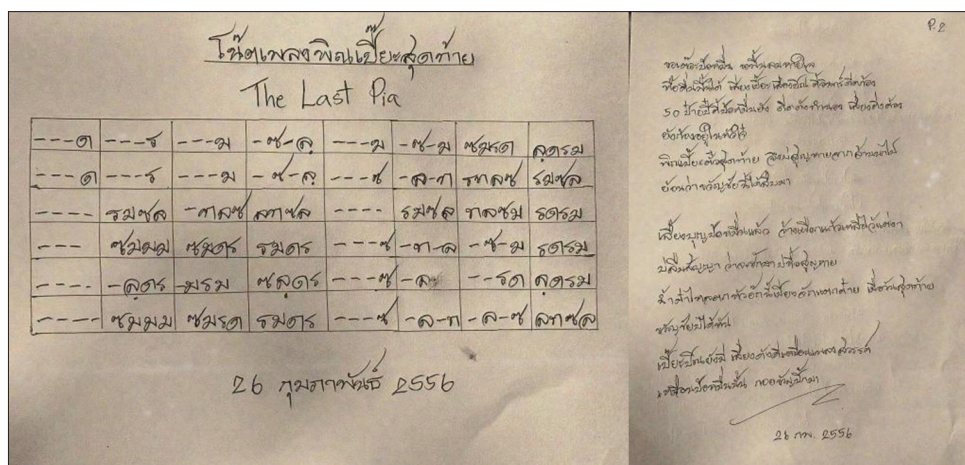
Between ten and thirty years ago, recording and distributing CDs of Phin Pia performances became a popular mode of transmission, particularly among Thai folk music fans who valued the uncommon and lovely sound of this traditional instrument. Ajarn Manop Thamdulphinit’s Lanna Music Shop in Chiang Mai sold the CDs, which featured performances by Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas. These recordings were popular among Thai listeners and foreign tourists, resulting in the sale of thousands of copies both domestically and overseas (Figure 5).

Live demonstrations of Phin Pia performances frequently accompanied CD sales, piquing the attention of visitors and music enthusiasts who saw the instrument as a source of traditional entertainment and therapeutic or contemplative music. The recordings included solo performances and groups combining Phin Pia with other Thai and international instruments, notably in spa-themed and music therapy settings. This phase of media output was instrumental in resurrecting and popularizing the Phin Pia (Figure 6).

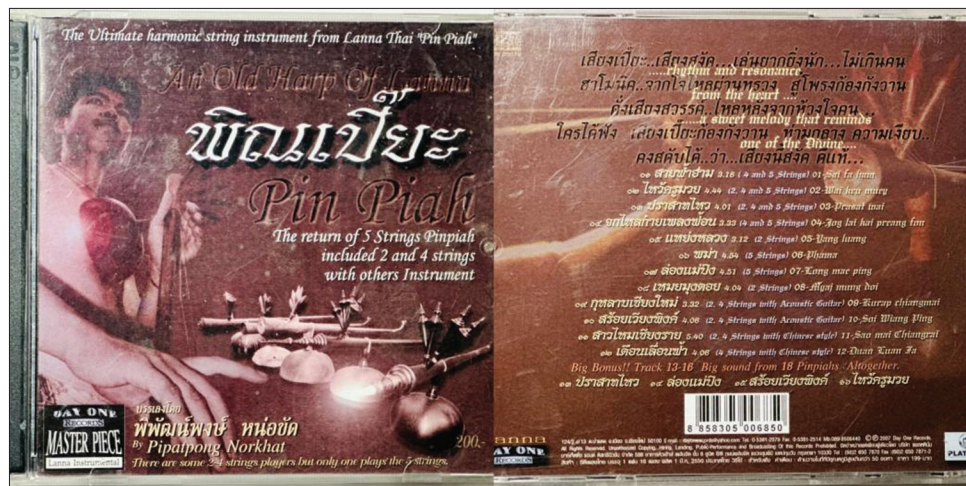
Pipatpong’s most valued accomplishment is a piece written as an homage to His Majesty King Rama IX that demonstrates Phin Pia’s entire expressive range and creative intricacy. This piece and many other performances were recorded as part of a national initiative to conserve traditional Thai music for future generations. Pipatpong has performed the Phin Pia in front of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn 10 times. Over 20 VCDs showing Phin Pia practices have been made and presented, with several being available on YouTube, allowing worldwide audiences to enjoy and learn from these vital cultural artifacts.

**Online transmission**

Online media, especially YouTube, have proven crucial for the global transmission of knowledge regarding the Phin Pia. Compilations of Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas’s performances, encompassing CD tracks, solo and ensemble presentations, collaborations with both Thai and foreign



**Figure 6.** Composition draft of “The Last Pia”  
Source: Qingbing Wei



**Figure 7.** The first CD album of Pipatpong  
Source: Qingbing Wei

musicians, and film soundtracks, have been assembled and made available for global access. It is believed that about 500 works relating to Phin Pia are presently accessible on YouTube. These function as pedagogical instruments and a cultural repository, establishing a fundamental resource for this project, which aims to investigate the impact of Phin Pia instructors and safeguard the legacy of this ancient Lanna zither within Thailand's musical history (Figure 7).

Furthermore, Pipatpong has proactively used online pedagogical techniques, including video tutorials and interactive courses that enable students from Thailand and abroad to learn the Phin Pia. These virtual platforms enable learners to get fundamental and advanced methods, providing access to training formerly available solely through in-person apprenticeship. The proliferation of digital instruction has considerably extended the instrument's accessibility, guaranteeing that the Phin Pia endures in contemporary society and persists as a vibrant heritage within the worldwide musical arena.

### The Procedure of Transmission via the Phin Pia Club

Since the inception of the Phin Pia Legend Continuation Club Luk Mae Raming Sri Nakhon Ping Chiang Mai in 2008, Pipatpong Srikritakornharidas and his pupils have diligently promoted Phin Pia music domestically and abroad. The club has partnered with several cultural networks to promote awareness of the Phin Pia, a historic musical instrument from the Lanna Kingdom in Northern Thailand—a nearly extinct art form. Their endeavors have facilitated incorporating Phin Pia performances into cultural events nationwide at colleges and other locations. Pipatpong has also advanced Phin Pia internationally via cultural exchange initiatives in France, India, China, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

Initially, Phin Pia music was disseminated through audio recordings sold on CDs and conventional radio broadcasts. The records comprised solo performances, group ensembles, and fusion compositions that integrated Thai and foreign musical influences. Over time, these initiatives transformed into digital distribution via platforms such as YouTube, greatly

enhancing the worldwide accessibility of Phin Pia music and creating an important repository for future generations.

The club has undertaken the significant duty of documenting and conserving the knowledge of Phin Pia teachers by classifying and recording their lessons in audio and video forms. These resources have been organized into a systematic body of knowledge for instructional objectives. This initiative developed a Phin Pia textbook, encompassing fundamental information about the instrument, its historical background, traditional song repertoires, and comprehensive descriptions of performing techniques. This textbook has facilitated the accessibility of Phin Pia education for both young and general lovers.

The club consistently highlights Phin Pia performances in traditional festivals around Chiang Mai Province and other areas of Northern Thailand to enhance awareness. These concerts are essential for the preservation and revitalization of Lanna's musical legacy. The group's cultural outreach has received national acclaim. In 2008, the Phin Pia Legend Continuation Club Luk Mae Raming Sri Nakhon Ping Chiang Mai was awarded the National Outstanding Youth Group Award for its significant contribution to the preservation, promotion, and transmission of indigenous musical traditions to Thai and foreign audiences. This acknowledgment underscores the importance of youth-driven initiatives in the preservation of Thailand's extensive musical history.

### DISCUSSION

The resurgence and dissemination of the Phin Pia, a traditional Lanna musical instrument, exemplify overarching themes in cultural preservation, identity, and educational adaptation. Thanks to the commitment of individuals such as Pipatpong Srikritakornharidas, Phin Pia has evolved from the brink of extinction to a revitalized status in both local and global cultural contexts (Shaout & Yousif, 2014). The pedagogical and performance methodologies he formulated—spanning oral tradition, individualized mentorship, structured textbook education, and digital media—demonstrate the revitalization and preservation of traditional knowledge within a

contemporary framework. Establishing the Phin Pia Legend Continuation Club and using tiered training methods exemplify a community-oriented and gradually organized approach to information dissemination. Implementing modern notation methods and instructional resources, including the inaugural Phin Pia textbook, has facilitated a more structured and accessible approach to music education (Hou & Seekhunlio, 2023; Sultanova, 2005). These initiatives have facilitated the instruction of the Phin Pia in educational institutions, thereby standardizing its playing skills and rendering the instrument more accessible to new generations (Chaithong et al., 2024).

Incorporating contemporary technologies has significantly contributed to the expansion of Phin Pia's reach. The shift from CD recordings to digital distribution via YouTube and other internet platforms has preserved significant performances and enabled worldwide access to educational information. The Phin Pia has garnered attention from audiences beyond Northern Thailand, attracting interest from international artists and scholars. The digital presence guarantees the Phin Pia legacy's sustainability and underscores multimedia techniques' efficacy in ethnomusicological education (Chen & Boonsrianun, 2024; Ravignani et al., 2018). Moreover, Phin Pia's resurgence as a symbol of Lanna identity highlights the instrument's cultural importance beyond its musical role. The acknowledgment from national entities, exemplified by the National Outstanding Youth Group Award, underscores the significance of grassroots efforts in cultural conservation (Prakitnonthakan, 2012; Yng & Kaoteera, 2021). This also indicates an increasing consciousness within Thai society regarding safeguarding and honoring regional cultural forms.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, restoring the Phin Pia demonstrates a viable approach for maintaining intangible cultural heritage by combining traditional mentorship, institutional engagement, and modern technical means. The efforts of Pipatpong Srikittakornharidas show how personal dedication, paired with community involvement and purposeful educational growth, can bridge the gap between historical traditions and modern cultural significance. His contributions, which range from one-on-one oral instruction to the development of the first Phin Pia textbook and the adoption of a unique notation system, represent a dynamic approach that honors tradition while welcoming innovation. Pipatpong's performances at colleges, cultural events, and worldwide venues have given the Phin Pia new visibility and incorporated it into current educational and cultural settings.

The extensive use of digital platforms such as YouTube has increased the reach and sustainability of Phin Pia music, making educational resources available to a global audience. The founding of the Phin Pia Legend Continuation Club and its acknowledgment by national organizations demonstrate the importance of youth-led, grassroots efforts in cultural preservation. These activities honor the Phin Pia as a symbol of Lanna tradition and encourage future generations to participate in preserving their cultural roots. As a case study, the Phin Pia revival demonstrates how historical practices

can persist in modern society when supported by adaptable teaching techniques, collaborative networks, and a shared dedication to cultural continuity.

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