

The Analysis of the State and the Causes of Problems in the Development of Young Puppeteers in Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to discuss the effect of the lack of long-term and concrete support and possibly the solution for Nang Yai Wat¹ Ban Don Group in Rayong Province. In 1980, the Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group came to life again after a long period of inactivity. It was named the Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group, and the abbot at that time, Phra Khru Burakhethwutthikorn, became the group's leader. The performers are children aged 6 to 23 years. They spend their free hours after school and work practicing their crafts, Nang Yai dancing and puppet carving, under the mentoring system. Unfortunately, these children have been supported only by a small group of the temple committees and their parents, and this has caused difficulty for the group's stability. The development year by year has been inconsistent depending on the group's situation, which is unpredictable. The findings of this study reveal that these problems need to be solved by

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¹ Wat: [wat] means a Buddhist monastery or temple.

both sides: the group itself and outside sources. The solution should embrace training programs, the management system, financial support and the opportunity plan.

Keywords: Nang Yai; grand Thai shadow puppet; Thai performance; safeguard

การวิเคราะห์สภาพและสาเหตุของปัญหาในการพัฒนาของ นักแสดงรุ่นเยาว์ในคณะหนังใหญ่วัดบ้านดอน

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บทคัดย่อ

จุดมุ่งหมายของงานวิจัยนี้คือการอภิปรายเรื่องการขาดแคลนการสนับสนุน
ระยะยาวและมั่นคงและการแก้ปัญหาที่เหมาะสมให้กับคณะหนังใหญ่วัดบ้านดอน จังหวัด
ระยอง ในปี พ.ศ.2523 คณะหนังใหญ่วัดบ้านดอนได้ถูกรื้อพื้นที่ขึ้นมาอีกรั้งหลังจากถูก
ละทิ้งไปเป็นเวลากว่า 6 ปี ทำให้ถูกตั้งชื่อว่าหนังใหญ่วัดบ้านดอน และท่านเจ้าอาวาสใน
ขณะนั้นก็รับหน้าที่เป็นหัวหน้าผู้ดูแลคณะ ผู้แสดงในคณะหนังใหญ่นั้นคือเยาวชนอายุ
6-23 ปี พากษาจะใช้เวลาว่างหลังเลิกเรียนและหลังเลิกงานมาฝึกฝนศิลปะการเชิด
หนังใหญ่ และการแก้หนังใหญ่ผ่านวิธีการฝึกในระบบพี่สอนน้อง เป็นที่น่าเสียดายที่
เยาวชนเหล่านี้ได้รับการสนับสนุนจากคนกลุ่มเล็กๆ เท่านั้น คือจากคณะกรรมการวัด
และผู้ปกครองซึ่งเป็นสาเหตุให้คณะหนังใหญ่วัดบ้านดอนขาดเสียศิลปะ พัฒนาการ
ของคณะในแต่ละปีก็เติบโตขึ้นอย่างไร้ทิศทางที่มั่นคงขึ้นอยู่กับสถานการณ์ของคณะ
ในขณะนั้นซึ่งไม่สามารถคาดเดาได้ จากผลการศึกษาพบว่าปัญหาเหล่านี้ต้องได้รับ
การแก้ไขจากกลุ่มที่เกี่ยวข้องสองฝ่าย คือจากตัวคณะเองและจากกลุ่มภายนอก การแก้
ปัญหาเหล่านี้ควรครอบคลุมเรื่องการฝึกซ้อม การจัดการ การสนับสนุนด้านการเงิน
และแผนการสร้างโอกาสในอนาคต

คำสำคัญ: หนังใหญ่; ศิลปะการแสดงไทย; การอนุรักษ์

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1. Introduction

Grand Thai shadow puppetry, Nang Yai, means giant shadow puppets. It is one of the finest performing arts in Thailand. Nang Yai reflects the flourish of Thai arts including performing arts from puppeteers, literature from Ramayana, and carving art from the shadow puppets. Nang Yai was resumed around the years 1751 to 1758, at the end of King Boromakot's reign. During that period, Nang Yai was a high-level performance that was performed only at the ceremony of the royal court. Unlike other kinds of shadow puppetry, Nang Yai not only presents the elaborateness of shadow puppets behind the screen but also shows the artistic movement of the puppeteer in front of the screen. Nang Yai puppeteers must be physically strong and very dedicated to their craft. For that reason, Nang Yai puppeteers are considered as dancers as well. It was performed only by male puppeteers who had been seriously trained by the masters.

At the end of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya (1758-1767), the rulers in many cities had founded their Nang Yai groups to enhance their social status. Nang Yai gradually became the notable performance for all audiences in Thailand and began to spread around Thailand. In this period, Nang Yai was managed under the patronage system. Nang Yai performers were taken care of by their patrons and the audiences were the patrons' guests. They were invited to see the fine performance with no admission fee. For this reason, Nang Yai performers were full-time artists who could devote their life to the art of shadow puppetry.

Eventually, the elaborate gesture of Nang Yai performers was developed to Khon mask dance, another magnificent performing art in Thailand. However, Nang Yai began to lose their popularity when western films came

into Thailand in 1904 and most of the patrons shut down Nang Yai groups completely after World War I had started. Since then, Nang Yai puppets were kept respectfully and untouchable in local temples because of the cultural belief about supernatural masters that dwell in the puppets.

Fortunately, in the reign of King Rama IX, the Thai government, and Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn tried to bring Nang Yai back to life again. Besides Nang Yai of Thai National Theater which is operated by the Fine Art Department, there are only three temples where Nang Yai have been preserved and still performed: Kanon Temple in Ratchaburi Province, Sawang Arom Temple in Sing Buri Province and Ban Don Temple in Rayong Province. Since they were left at the temple and there was no support from the patron anymore, the group leader of every temple had to be the abbot who was in charge of bringing in people and budget to operate the performance of Nang Yai. Overall, the similarity of these three temples is that all of them recruit local children as Nang Yai performers. Adults are not interested in performing any longer fundamentally because Nang Yai performances struggle to make more funds and require lots of training time.

2. Nang Yai Wat Ban Don

Nang Yai Wat Ban Don is one of the three existing Nang Yai groups in Thailand; the oldest puppets are over 200 years old. Wat Ban Don's signature is not only its traditional way of shadow puppet performing, but also their contemporary features in the play. The development of Nang Yai Wat Ban Don can be divided into four periods:

2.1 First Period: Nonprofit Organization (Patronage System)



Figure 1. Nang Yai Wat Ban Don

The first period is the origin of Nang Yai Wat Ban Don in Rayong Province. Phya Srisamuthpokchaichotchitsongkram (Gate Yomjinda), the first Rayong's ruler, around 1888, traveled to Phatthalung Province in the south of Thailand and had a chance to see the well-known Nang Yai performance from Ayutthaya Province. He was deeply impressed and decided to form his own Nang Yai group in Rayong. He purchased shadow puppets and hired Nai Nang (puppeteer master) to teach Rayong locals the art of Nang Yai. It was relatively favored by Rayong people, especially the chapter of Sita's Trial by Fire from Ramayana in which a female dancer performed an actual walk on fire which was not in Nang Yai tradition but this was adapted to suit the local's taste. Interestingly, in this period, Rayong people did embrace Nang

Yai to their culture, presumably because of the excellent quality and the adaptation of performance which reflected the good strategy of group management. On account of the patronage system, puppeteers were taken care of by the Nang Yai group owner. The activity was their career that they could focus on practicing through their lives. The patronage system also made costly shadow puppet carving possible, as each puppet would take the whole skin of a cow or a buffalo and Nang Yai group under the support of Phya Srisamuthpokchaichotchitsongkram had carved at least 200 puppets in this period.

2.2 The Abandoned Period

After the First World War, economic crisis and changing entertainment media trends such as movies were the main critical elements for Nang Yai's decline in popularity. As a consequence, the rulers who possessed Nang Yai began to shut down their groups. This occurrence reflected the disadvantage of the patronage system on which the entire performance group solely depended. Nang Yai of Phya Srisamuthpokchaichotchitsongkram was one of those. The puppeteers had to stop performing and find another job. The art of puppeteering faded away from Ban Don community. Moreover, because of the cultural beliefs, Nang Yai puppets had to be kept in the temple and people were frightened to get involved with them.

2.3 Revival Period: Mixed Organization (Public-Private Partnership)



Figure 2. Nang Yai puppeteers in the past

In 1980, Nang Yai was performed again in response to the government policy on "Best Village Competition". Since this period, the Nang Yai group was taken care of by Ban Don Temple led by Phra Kru Panyawuthikorn, Wat Ban Don abbot at the time, and Professor Umnard Maneesaeng, Rayong's artist. They dedicated their time to being Nang Yai leaders. At first, the performance was mainly to respond to the government policy, but Nang Yai conservation group had a persistent attempt to keep Nang Yai Wat Ban Don alive. The old performers tried to pass on the art of Nang Yai to the new generation. During this period, the group members aimed to preserve the original Nang Yai traditions as much as possible but the adaptation from the first period, Sita's Trial by Fire, which appealed to the audience, was cut off because nobody volunteered to do it. The group management in this period has changed from nonprofit organization (patronage system) to mixed organization. The group was mainly run by the head of Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group and it had different kinds of supports from other sources such as

Ban Don Temple, the public sector, and the private sector. Consequently, unlike the first period, the practice in the revival period was not at its full capability since puppeteers were not full-time hired by the patron, so the time they used for practice was limited. Moreover, the traditional style of the performance created a distance from the audience, making Nang Yai's popularity decrease in this era. The audience found the performance unique however not entertaining and well-rehearsed, so they did not have the eagerness to see the performance again. A lot of them did not even finish the two-hour show. Therefore, Nang Yai did not have that many shows performed and many puppeteers started to leave the group. At this point, the group leaders solved problems by recruiting young boys to perform Nang Yai.

2.4 Experimental Era



Figure 3. Young puppeteers practice Nang Yai

This era is when artists and scholars have joined in a development of Nang Yai performance in cooperation with the group's artists. The objective is to encourage understanding of and participation in Nang Yai group in the process of creating suitable Wat Ban Don identity and for the performers to improve their performance further. Through these experiments, many aspects of Nang Yai performance had been developed such as script, music, costume and set design, puppeteer's body movement and acting skill.



Figure 4. Nang Yai performance by young puppeteers

After the Nang Yai group had developed, it has attracted more audience and became better known. They gradually received more bookings to perform at events and TV shows as well as won several awards. The group became more accepted by the local people. Parents are starting to encourage their children to join the group and practice after school. The program to train youth in Nang Yai puppet performances became more stable and clear.

However, even though the performance quality of the group has developed impressively for the last seven years, the group management system has hardly developed. They still have no long-term support from other sources. To safeguard Nang Yai, the training is not only the primary factor. An effective management system is critical for Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group as well. The analysis is intended to focus on the group management system to reflect on problems of the group management.

3. Participating Parties in the Development of the Nang Yai Performance



Figure 5. The Management System for Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group

According to Figure 5, although young puppeteers are the primary mechanism of the group, they depend on the management of other divisions. The system can be divided as follows:

3.1 The Inner Sectors

3.1.1 The Young Nang Yai Puppeteers



Figure 6. Young puppeteers of Wat Ban Don Group

There are currently 30 members from ages 6-25 years. The group does not have a limit in the membership. If anyone would like to apply, they can inform the members and join. All they have to do is to participate in the routine practice two days a week. Practice is on Mondays and Wednesdays from 6-7.30 pm. In fact, the children prefer to come in and practice every day because they would get to meet their friends. However, the training is limited to only two days because of the management reasons which will be discussed later. The process and the format of the performance are usually done by the older members. The young ones do not have much chance to give their opinion. Every puppeteer at Wat Ban Don does not have the salary. They will get paid if they perform in the shows. The amount of payment depends on the jobs. Mostly, in one performance, they would receive 200-300 THB for young performers and 400-600 THB for older performers. Clearly, having

more bookings is a significant effect on the members. In the old traditional way, the younger members would not have a chance to perform until their performance satisfied Nang Yai master which means years of training. Nowadays having every kid perform will draw them and their parents to participate in the group longer. "...all members want to perform, it's normal, and if we don't let them perform, they will get bored, and the parents won't see the result of all the practice they've been coming to every week. Eventually, they will quit, and we will lose performers." (Mr. Ampai Boonrod, a group manager, interview, 15 April, 2015) However, this issue is still under debate because more people performing means more expenses and more share of income. Also, having many inexperienced puppeteers in a show can affect the quality of it.

We don't need that many puppeteers on stage. They are trying to squeeze inside the screen frame and make the audience unable to see the puppet clearly. Moreover, some of the kids' skills are not ready for the real performance, so they make the show look unprofessional. Unfortunately, we can't find the better solution yet. (Mr. Akkharapol Cherngkrai, a head of puppeteer, interview, 15 April, 2015)

3.1.2 Head of the Puppeteers

The current head is Mr. Akkharapol Cherngkrai and Mr. Mana Luangphon, the first batch of puppeteers, who learned Nang Yai craft from old masters, professional artists and scholars. They graduated from and are working in Rayong Province. After work, their duty is to train the young puppeteers and direct the performance with Ajarn Ampai, the group manager. When the two heads are unavailable, their assistants, the second batch, will be

in charge. Their system is the brotherly system in which they take care of each other like family and have fun during practice and recess. Mr. Akkharapol Cherngkrai and Mr. Mana Luangphon are determined to pass this legacy on and on. They both have contributed a lot to the group without expecting anything in return. Their goal is to inspire the young to pass on this legacy.

There're not many groups anymore. I have been here for 15 years, and I want the children to keep it because I don't know how long I am going to live. I will perform until I can no longer perform. I know I cannot make a living out of this, but I am happy. (Mr. Akkharapol Cherngkrai, interview, 4 July, 2015)



Figure 7. Mr. Akkharapol Cherngkrai

Figure 8. Mr. Mana Luangpon

Although they have great passion in Nang Yai, they have a hard time maintaining their commitment. Since the group cannot provide salary to them, they have to work and also have families to take care of. Sometimes

they cannot manage to come to the routine practice. They need the next generation to help them on the tasks but with the same reasons, all the older members are struggling to manage time for practicing the younger members. For this reason, the rehearsal time is limited to only two days a week.

3.1.3 The Group Manager



Figure 9. Ajarn Ampai Boonrod

The current group manager is Ajarn Ampai Boonrod who is considered a very important person to the Nang Yai Wat Ban Don because he has been involved in every aspect of the group. He first became a member of the group as the voice actor but because of his proficiency in the Thai language, he was also the script editor. When the group became bigger and received more bookings, he increased the number of performances in Ramayana and became a show director. At present, after the retirement of Mrs. Sathien, the former manager and the passing of the late abbot, Ajarn Ampai became the group manager. From interviewing the members, they all agree that having him as

the manager has expanded the group stability because he tries to collaborate with many organizations. Ajarn Ampai has built a solid foundation for his successor. Nevertheless, because of his health and his full-time job, Mr. Ampai lets the head of the puppeteers take care of the practice, and he does not think the kids should come to practice too much. "...I don't want parents to worry about their children. We practice after school so by the time we finish it will be quite late. I prefer the kids to rehearse on the weekend before the show. That's quite enough." (Mr. Ampai Boonrod, interview, 15 April, 2015)

As the group manager, Ajarn Ampai also has to deal with the bookings. Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group has developed to a satisfying point. Ajarn Ampai sets up three options for clients to choose:

1. Partial performance, on stage, no screen or live music, duration 10-30 minutes
2. Partial performance, on stage, no screen, live music and voiceover, duration 20-30 minutes
3. Full performance, screen, live music, voiceover, duration no less than one hour.

From 2013 to 2016, 130 shows have been performed and recorded, and approximately 30% were performed at their theater which mostly consists of students and organizations that the group has arranged a demonstration. The other 70% were outside events. Most of the clients preferred to see Nang Yai in a short version. They wanted to see the demonstration, not the whole one-hour performance.

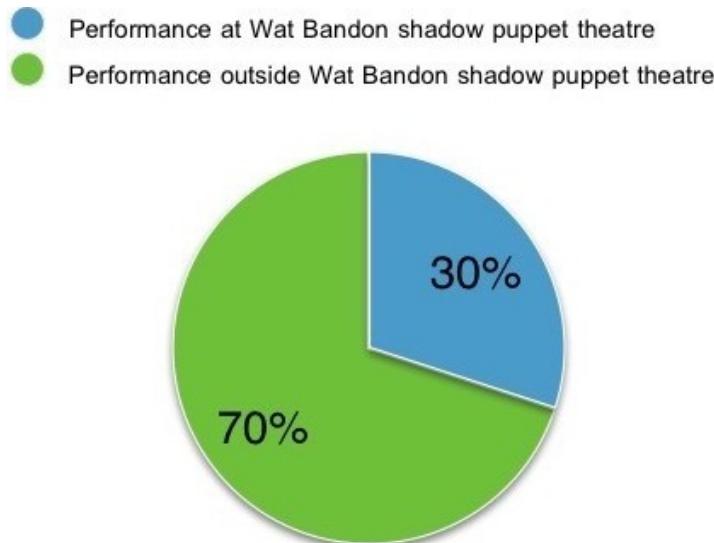


Figure 10. Chart of Nang Yai Wat Ban Don performance

130 shows (2013-2016)

Sometimes, other members think it is not sensible to take some jobs such as very small budget jobs, the events that let them perform at inappropriate space or the jobs that would lower their standard. However, Ajarn Ampai is aware of these issues and trying to balance between aesthetic and good management. "...if we do not take this kind of jobs, the kids won't have opportunities to perform, and we won't have budget to support the group." (Ajarn Ampai Boonrod, interview, 4 July, 2015)

3.1.4 The traditional orchestra

Finding a Thai orchestra band to accompany Nang Yai performance is tough because there are many disadvantages for the band to participate in the performances. Since they have to perform together in harmony with the Nang Yai group, they need to devote their time in many rehearsals. Fortunately,

the Nang Yai group has received continuous support from the Lumjiak Thai orchestra. The orchestra also consists of young members. These two groups have the same goal which is to train the next generation and to pass on the culture. Ajarn Saichon, head of the band, has the will to continue supporting Nang Yai. "Exchanging knowledge between the young musicians and the puppeteers is very important and a good way to promote Thai Art. Sometimes I have to cancel other jobs in order to rehearse with Nang Yai group, but it's all right because I want to safeguard Nang Yai." (Saichol Nagpun, interview, 15 April, 2015)

Nevertheless, Mr. Saichol reveals that he has some concerns about the Nang Yai's standard. Some clients have hired them with a tiny budget, and the group chooses to take it by cutting out the Thai orchestra band and using CD players instead. He compares this standard with that of another well-known group, Nang Yai Wat Kanon in Ratchaburi Province, which is very strict on the quality of the show and avoids accepting the jobs that are lower than their standard.



Figure 11. Lumjiak Orchestra

3.1.5 Financial and Beneficial Manager

Mrs. Sathien Maneesaeng, wife of Ajarn Amnad Maneesaeng, one of the founders along with the late abbot, is taking care of all financial matters for the group. This job requires great responsibility, but everyone is satisfied that Mrs. Sathien is in this position because she has been here for a long time and everyone respects and trusts her. Her role is also similar to a guardian of the young puppeteers. She knows about their life situation and is always a helper for them. Unfortunately, recently, her responsibility has slowly changed due to her health condition. Mrs. Sathien cannot come to take care of the kids as much as she could. Nowadays, in most rehearsals, the young puppeteers have to take care of themselves instead.

3.1.6 Nang Yai Committee

The committee includes past puppeteers, the temple committee, and the group manager. Most of them will get involved only when the group has to participate in big events. Overall, most of them are less involved, and they let the group manager take care of all activities. There is no solid plan set up by Nang Yai committee such as financial support or management strategy.

3.1.7 Wat Ban Don

In the past, Ban Don Temple was the important drive to the group for their revival of the Nang Yai performance, and the group has been using the areas in the temple for practice, storage, and as a Nang Yai theater. The important person in these supports was Phra Khru Burakhethawutthikorn, who at that time was the abbot of Ban Don temple. When he passed away suddenly in 2014, a major change occurred for the group as well because the excellent support for the group was mainly from him but not much from the other monks. Therefore, when he passed away, there was not any clear

strategic plan from other monks to support the group. Nevertheless, the group still uses the venue for events and practices, and borrows transportations when they have to perform elsewhere.



Figure 12. Phra Khru Burakhethwutthikorn

However, the temple is likely concerned about Nang Yai as it could be seen through the process of choosing the new abbot; this person must be able to manage and support the Nang Yai group as much as the late abbot. Mrs. Sathien Maneesaeng, the former manager of the Nang Yai group, states that the Ban Don Temple understands that the primary mission of the abbot of Ban Don Temple is to look after the Nang Yai group. There is a high chance that Ban Don Temple will continue to support the group. However, these past two years has been quite a hard time for the group members as they have to manage everything without the former abbot and not much help from the temple.

3.1.8 Ban Don Temple Committee

The role of the committee towards the group is not different from that of the temple. In other words, the committee has no problem with the Nang Yai's activities but do not have any policies to maintain or improve it. There is a high possibility that the committee may also need more time to adjust in becoming more involved with the group after the former abbot has passed away. At present, the committee's role is to manage mostly financials involving the temple. However, after the group's reputation has been rising, several committee members have become more concerned to support the group and started to learn the group's system. So, the role of the committee being involved is quite promising.

3.2 Outer Sector

3.2.1 Public Sector

The public sector seems to be more active in supporting Nang Yai as seen in the emerging projects in the last two years such as the ongoing municipal project in approving the budget to renovate the theater. Also, the mayor of Choengnoen District has an idea to increase the job description of district staffs which involves supporting the Nang Yai. They also plan to hire one of the group members to be in this position which is a very exciting news for all group members as it will support their living expense as well.

Even though the supports from bigger sectors such as provincial or ministries may be minor compared to other well-known Nang Yai groups, they are still in positive directions. Recently many public sectors have hired the Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group to perform in national events more than before, from 2-3 events per year to more than ten events per year.

However, although interest from public sectors has increased, the support was mainly for opportunities to perform more than focusing on a sustainable budget. Ajarn Ampai Boonrod, head of the Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group, provided information about public sectors that sectors directly involved with the Nang Yai group, such as the Rayong Province cultural center, has limitations in supporting the group due to the lack of financial support from their headquarters. To gain financial support, there must be a project or policy concerning the Nang Yai.

3.2.2 Private Sector

Rayong Province has several significant private sectors because it is a location for big factories and is one of the main logistic sites of Thailand. Private sectors are important sources of income and support for local cultural events. For Nang Yai, it seems to receive more support than in the past. "At the moment, there is a project in building a Nang Yai Museum with a budget of up to 3 million baht from the Department of the Industrial Works trust fund. This project is the collaboration between local authorities and is pending for the governor's approval." (Ajarn Ampai Boonrod, interview, 4 July, 2015)

However, in the trainers' perspective, they do not want only maintenance support but also support that facilitates the performances as well, and they believe they should receive more support from private sectors judging from their geographical advantage. "There are many factories in Rayong. If they would give us a small portion of their money, we could make a lot out of it. Right now we get some support such as for equipment and maintenance, but not long-term support which we still don't know how it is going to be." (Mana Luangphon, interview, 4 July, 2015)

3.2.3 Ban Don Neighborhood

It is significant that people at Ban Don Neighborhood support the Nang Yai group more than ever as can be seen from the performance bookings around Rayong and also their encouragement to have their children become members. This is considered a satisfactory progress for the group's development. When researchers went to investigate the group in 2010, there were no more than 15 young puppeteers, and they mostly stayed for a short-term. The reasons were not only from the hard practice but also from few bookings and from parents who thought that the group might be a place for the young to misbehave. But nowadays, these young members have proven their determination. With the support from professional artists, scholars and older members, they have practiced hard and created good quality performances and gained a reputation nationwide. For this, the local's perspectives changed, and now it has become part of the neighborhood.

3.2.4 Wat Ban Don School

The school is located next to the Ban Don Temple, and there are several students interested in becoming puppeteers. Collaboration between the school and the temple was less in the past. Even though the school has Nang Yai lessons included in their curriculum, it is never in the same direction as the Nang Yai group. But now, after Mr. Ampai Boonrod tried to collaborate with Wat Ban Don School, both the school and the group have shared policies. For example, the group was involved in designing the Nang Yai lessons at the school for the students to have a better foundation and the students can now apply as a group member. Moreover, the school has allowed students who are members to be absent whenever they have to perform.

3.2.5 Parents of the Puppeteers

When the group lacks sustainable financial support like today, the parents have become big supporters of the Nang Yai. The parents help prepare food and facilitate in transportation. Having the parents' involvement is a huge benefit. Families are able to spend time together and support each other. Children have built their self-esteem by knowing that what they have been doing is important, and their parents truly appreciate it. In a community level, it helped the locals to bond over and value their local art.

4. Conclusion

According to the aforementioned information, Nang Yai group can be analyzed as the following SWOT analysis:

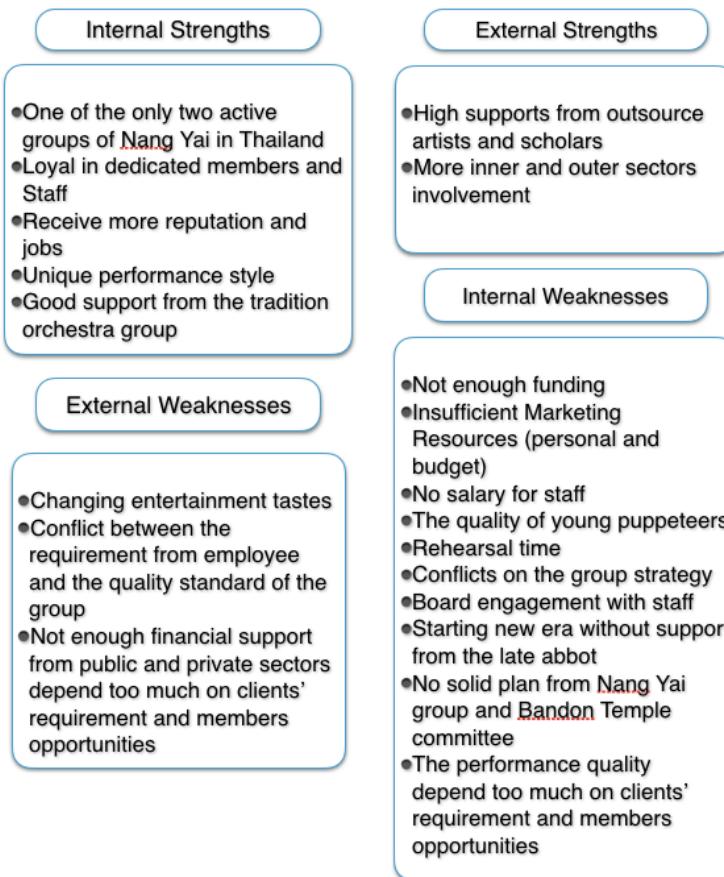


Figure 13. SWOT analysis of Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Management

Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group has developed their crafts pleasantly. The rising reputation and number of performances attract more children to the group. It has been increasingly invited to perform in big events especially national events such as the 2014 World Puppet Show Festival, the 62nd national student handcrafts, To Be Number One Event, the overnight New Year's praying ceremony at Wat Arunrachawaram, 8th Nang Yai Wat Kanon festival, and other university events. Hard training is compensated by fun

activities with brotherhood system. Most of the parents start to see the bright side of Nang Yai training and encourage their children to be part of the group. Overall, these young puppeteers have proved that they have faith in Nang Yai art, and they do their best to safeguard it. The thing that Nang Yai Wat Ban Don Group should always keep in mind in the future is to keep the performance standard to a decent level and to find ways to inspire kids to stay in the group rather than allowing everyone to perform and bring out an imperfect performance, such as by holding an audition for each performance to encourage kids to push themselves further. Moreover, it is important to find a clear identity because there is a chance that they will modernize the performance. However, they must do it with caution and prevent it from losing its uniqueness. In terms of management, the main factor of the group stability is the sustainable financial support and solid strategy plan from the inner and outer sectors. The group should not depend only on unstable profit from clients and should try to establish more connection with their supporters. The inner sectors should have a solid plan and take full responsibility as a replacement of the late abbot. Moreover, they should have more communication with the outer sectors and reach out for more supports both in public relation and finance. The outer sectors should have a mindset that Nang Yai Wat Ban Don is a public treasure that every party has the responsibility to safeguard.

"If we receive financial support, even if the young puppeteers are not employed, they will still have their performance salary more or less." (Mana Luangphon, interview, 6 April, 2015) Like other professional performance groups, including Nang Yai Wat Kanon, each member should have salary to support them financially and spiritually. They should consider this activity as their job, not only as a hobby or a sacrifice. Even though they

love this art wholeheartedly, they need support from every party, not only as the opportunity to perform but also as the possibility to survive.



Figure 14. A Nang Yai puppeteer is paying respect to Nang Yai puppets

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