

MYTH, MEANING AND STRUCTURE: A LÉVI-STRAUSSIAN ANALYSIS OF THAI-LANGUAGE OPERAS

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: This research examines four Thai-language Western-style operas: *Ngau Pa* (2000) by Pathorn Srikanonnda, *The Lunch Box* (2009) by Thanapoom Sirichang, and *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals* (2008) and *Covido The Opera* (2021), both by Krisada and Napisi Reyes. Though relatively new, they already play a key role in Thailand's opera tradition, bringing together old stories, Buddhist ideas and issues from modern life. The research employed Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of myth to examine ways operas use story patterns, and how their narrative structures maintain cultural values and tradition, while incorporating modern issues. The study aims to highlight inclusions such as family responsibility, love, grief, sacrifice, despair and renewal, as well as symbolic and supernatural entities which bring about transformation. As a result, the study shines a light on the ways Thai-language operas remain tied to tradition while integrating contemporary issues.

Methods: The research employs Lévi-Strauss's structuralist method of analysis, in which each opera is first segmented into minimal narrative units (mythemes) based on libretti, synopses, and available performance materials. These units are then grouped into binary oppositions according to narrative tension, such as filial rejection versus maternal devotion or stasis versus reconnection. The oppositions are subsequently arranged into vertical columns to map how narrative relationships shift and develop across each work. This process enables rigorous comparison across the four operas while revealing underlying structural coherence. Secondary sources on structuralism, mythology, and opera provide contextual support and guide interpretation in line with Lévi-Strauss's approach.

Results: The findings indicate that all four operas follow a consistent four-part mythic structure, demonstrating the continued influence of traditional narrative logic in Thai-language opera. Across the works, binary oppositions such as love versus duty, despair versus support, and isolation versus engagement are consistently shaped through symbolic or supernatural figures. These elements drive narrative transformation and allow contemporary concerns, including environmental crisis, mental health, and pandemic-induced isolation, to be expressed within enduring mythic patterns.

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Conclusions: This research demonstrates that Thai-language opera functions as a contemporary vehicle for myth, using structural oppositions and symbolic elements to negotiate both traditional values and modern social issues. By applying Lévi-Straussian analysis, the research highlights how inherited narrative structures remain active and adaptable within a Southeast Asian operatic context. While limited by the small number of available works, the findings position Thai-language opera as a dynamic site of ethnomusicology in which cultural continuity and contemporary relevance intersect.

Keywords: Thai-Language Operas / Lévi-Straussian Analysis / Structuralism / Mythic Structures / Ethnomusicology / Contemporary Thai Culture / Socio-Cultural Dynamics

Introduction

Since the turn of the century, Western-style Thai-language operas have continued to develop as contemporary art forms, drawing upon traditional and modern narratives to communicate values central to Thai identity. Of particular interest is how these operas manage to honour cultural heritage while responding to contemporary global and domestic issues.

Myths and folk stories, though often orally transmitted and uncoded, have long served as narrative frameworks that guide social conduct, reflect community values, and offer insight into moral dilemmas. Throughout human history, these widely shared traditional stories often acted as a precursor to formal, legal systems, instilling civil justice and moral ethos.¹ They often feature characters representing moral extremes, demonstrating consequences and promoting desirable behaviour; shaping and guiding the population towards a direction considered mutually beneficial for a country as a whole.² These stories' reinterpretation within operatic form allows them to reach new audiences and preserve their relevance. Lévi-Strauss viewed myths as structured by oppositions, with power emerging from recurring patterns across cultures.³ Therefore, given that Thai-language operas frequently draw on folklore, moral narratives, and the use of symbolic figures, they exhibit structural features comparable to mythic storytelling. Lévi-Strauss's approach, which focuses on binary oppositions and underlying narrative relations, is therefore particularly well suited to analyse how these works organise meaning and negotiate tensions between tradition and modernity.

¹ M. Stuart Madden, "Myth, Folklore and Ancient Ethics," SSRN, posted October 19, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.938128>.

² A. I. Dontsov et al., "The Role of Mythological Ideas in Children's Socialization and Subjective Well-Being," in *Early Childhood Care and Education*, ed. Sonja Sheridan and Nikolay Veraksa, vol. 43 of European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences (London: Future Academy, 2018), 221-229, <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2018.07.30>.

³ Ze'ev Levy, "Claude Lévi-Strauss' Structural Anthropology and Mythology as Ultimate Meaning," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 21, no. 2 (June 1998): 135-143, <https://doi.org/10.3138/uram.21.2.135>.

Research Objective

To apply Lévi-Strauss's structuralist theory to Thai-language operas, identifying how narrative structures and binary oppositions reflect recurring socio-cultural values.

Literature Review

Structuralism, as pioneered by Lévi-Strauss, offers a framework for understanding how repeated narrative patterns and symbolic oppositions generate meaning, which is a process aligned with semiotic thinking.⁴ In operatic contexts, Lévi-Strauss likened myth to an orchestral score presented linearly, with the analyst's task being to reconstruct its underlying structure.⁵ He admired Wagner's operas as examples of Gesamtkunstwerk (total artwork) viewing them as mythic, symbolic and musical tapestries.⁶

This alignment between mythic structure and opera supports the study of Thai-language operas, which often draw on folklore, moral binaries and archetypal figures. For instance, composer Thanapoom Sirichang developed *The Lunch Box* based on its roots in a common Buddhist story told by monks and passed through generations.⁷ Modern scholars agree that such operatic adaptations blend symbolic myth with drama to produce layered, cross-cultural meanings.⁸ Others show how opera libretti often reuse structural motifs.⁹

Lévi-Strauss's focus on structuralism and myth anthropology has been applied across a range of contexts. Recent studies have examined Sasak folktales,¹⁰ Malayan communities,¹¹ Glück's *A Myth of*

⁴ Tatiana Jankowska, "Between Nature and Culture: Lévi-Strauss's Structural Analysis of Myth in the Light of Semiotics," *Respectus Philologicus* 25, no. 30 (April 2014): 211-217, <https://doi.org/10.15388/respectus.2014.25.30.16>.

⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (October-December 1955): 428-444, https://www.people.iup.edu/sherwood/Archived-Courses/ENGL752Sull-05/Docs/Structural_Study_of_Myth.pdf.

⁶ Vlado Kotnik, "Lévi-Strauss and the Opera," *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 4, no. 2 (2009): 101-120, <https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v4i2.6>.

⁷ Fueanglada Prawang, "The Emergence of Thai Opera: Performance as Cultural Synergy" (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2021), 177, https://research.bangor.ac.uk/files/37458630/2021_Prawang_PhD_Music_Thesis.pdf.

⁸ Alexander Chih-Yuan Mai, "Mythologizing the Narrative: An Analytical Study of Turnage/Berkoff's *Greek* (1989) and the Nature of Operatic Narrative," *English Language, Literature and Culture* 6, no. 3 (2021): 82, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ellc.20210603.15>; Diana Richelle North, "Epic Explorations in Opera: The Hero's Overture" (PhD diss., Pacific Graduate Institute, USA, 2020), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/ff17bd0f40c918b45c69dcc661f176d2/>; Nina Penner, *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv177tj35>.

⁹ Luca Giovannini and Daniil Skorinkin, "Computational Approaches to Opera Libretti," *Journal of Computational Literary Studies* 3, No. 1 (2024): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.48694/jcls.3595>; Sofia Mazar, "The Phenomenon of Intertextuality in 19th Century Italian Opera Libretti: The Example of G. Donizetti's 'Lucia Di Lammermoor,'" *Psychology Research* 12, no. 5 (May 2022): 244-252, <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5542/2022.05.004>; Luca Pavan, "Italian Opera Librettos with Similar Plot: Plagiarism or Established Practice?," *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics* 6, no. 2 (June 2020): 76-80, <https://doi.org/10.18178/ijll.2020.6.2.254>.

¹⁰ Galih Suryadmaja et al., "Analysis of Levi-Strauss's Structuralism on the Myth of Princess Mandalika," *Global Journal of Social Learning* 1, no. 2 (June 2025): 42-51, <https://doi.org/10.71094/gjssl.v1i2.61>.

¹¹ Muhd. Arief Al Husaini, "Understanding Traditional Malay Communities in Riau Using the Levi-Strauss Framework of Structuralism," *International Journal of Architecture and Urbanism* 8, no. 1 (2024): 86-93, <https://doi.org/10.32734/ijau.v8i1.15093>.

Innocence,¹² and the novel *Lontara*.¹³ Within ethnomusicology and performance studies, structuralist methods have been used to analyse a Taiwanese musical, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*,¹⁴ to explore mythological themes in French flute music,¹⁵ and to interpret opera, from Wagnerian myth¹⁶ to binary oppositions in modern works.¹⁷ Similarly, Kozel demonstrates how musical structures mirror mythical thought, highlighting structuralism's relevance beyond narrative myth.¹⁸ Halle extends this by showing how linguistic structures and generative grammar can inform musical analysis,¹⁹ while Kartomi emphasises the role of historical and cultural contexts in understanding Southeast Asian performance practices.²⁰ Recent international scholarship emphasises the value of comparative analysis in interpreting cultural narratives across societies,²¹ while ethnomusicological research highlights performance as a dynamic cultural practice through which communities express identity and negotiate social values.²² Together, this body of research supports the continued relevance of structuralist analysis in revealing persistence of mythic logic within music and performance, including in Southeast Asian cultural environments.

Critics of structuralism, including Eagleton²³ and Richardson,²⁴ argue it can overlook agency and nuance. However, others defend its ongoing value, such as Doja,²⁵ who reframes structuralism as foundational to modern

¹² Enes Taşdelen, "Louise Glück's 'A Myth of Innocence' and the Myth of Persephone: A Structuralist Analysis through Lévi-Strauss," *Istanbul University Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 1 (2025): 240-261, <https://doi.org/10.26650/SJ.2025.45.1.0763>.

¹³ Sinta Alfila, Dwi Widayati, and Bambang Riyanto, "Levi-Strauss's Myth Structuralism in the Novel *Lontara* by Windy Joana," *Bahasa Indonesia Prima (BIP)* 7, no. 1 (March 2025): 1-8, <https://jurnal.unprimdn.ac.id/index.php/BIP/article/view/5993>.

¹⁴ Iris H. Tuan, "Myth and Levi-Strauss: Taiwan Musical *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* & Chinese Film *The Monkey King: Kingdom of Women*," in *Pop with Gods, Shakespeare, and AI* (Singapore: Springer Verlag, 2020), 65-81, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7297-5_4.

¹⁵ Yerzhan Kushanov, "Mythological Theme in French Flute Music," *Saryn Art and Science Journal* 9, no. 3 (2021): 32-38, <https://sarynjournal.kz/index.php/saryn/article/view/152>.

¹⁶ John Leavitt, "Mytheme and Motif: Lévi-Strauss and Wagner," *Intersections* 30, no. 1 (2010): 95-116, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1003501ar>; Vlado Kotnik, "Lévi-Strauss and the Opera," *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 4, no. 2 (2009): 101-120, <https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v4i2.6>.

¹⁷ Yayoi Uno Everett, *Reconfiguring Myth and Narrative in Contemporary Opera: Osvaldo Golijov, Kaija Saariaho, John Adams, and Tan Dun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

¹⁸ David Kozel, "A Musical Analysis of Mythical Thought in the Work of Claude Lévi-Strauss," *Musicologica Olomucensia* 22 (2015): 61-78, https://www.academia.edu/24579189/A_Musical_Analysis_of_Mythical_Thought_in_the_Work_of_Claude_Lévi_Strauss.

¹⁹ John Halle, "From Linguistics to Musicology: Notes on Structuralism, Musical Generativism, Cognitive Science, and Philosophy," *Signata* 6 (2015): 287-311, <https://doi.org/10.4000/signata.1109>.

²⁰ Margaret J. Kartomi, "'Traditional Music Weeps' and Other Themes in the Discourse on Music, Dance, and Theatre of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (September 1995): 366-400, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400007141>.

²¹ Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges: Explorations In, On, and With Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

²² Philip V. Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²³ Terry Eagleton, "Post-Structuralism," in *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 110-130.

²⁴ Brian Richardson, "Beyond Poststructuralism: Theory of Character, the Personae of Modern Drama, and the Antinomies of Critical Theory," *Modern Drama* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 86-99, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mdr.1997.0000>.

²⁵ Albert Doja, "The Shoulders of Our Giants: Claude Lévi-Strauss and His Legacy in Current Anthropology," *Social Science Information* 45, no. 1 (March 2006): 79-107, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018406061104>; Albert Doja, "Lévi-Strauss's Heroic Anthropology Facing Contemporary Problems of the Modern World," *Reviews in Anthropology* 49, no. 1-2 (2020): 4-38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00938157.2020.1794140>.

anthropology and cultural analysis.

While these studies demonstrate the wide applicability of structuralist analysis across narrative and musical contexts, its use in the analysis of Thai-language opera remains limited, particularly in relation to contemporary works. Existing studies demonstrate the usefulness of Lévi-Straussian analysis in revealing underlying narrative structures, yet little attention has been given to how these methods can illuminate emerging operatic traditions in Southeast Asia.

Research Methodology

In response to this gap, this research applies Lévi-Strauss's structural method to four Thai-language operas, selected according to clearly defined criteria, in order to examine how their narrative structures reflect and reinterpret socio-cultural values.

First, each work had to be composed in the Western operatic tradition while employing the Thai language, ensuring consistency of form and cultural context. Second, the operas had to be accessible through libretti, synopses, or recorded or documented performances, allowing for detailed structural analysis. Third, the selection includes both adaptations of traditional narratives and original contemporary works in order to capture a range of subject matter. Finally, the selection reflects the limited but emerging body of Thai-language opera currently available, making these four works representative of the field at this stage of its development:

1. *Ngau Pau* (2000) by Pathorn Srikananonda – adapted from local folklore.
2. *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals* (2008) by Krisada and Napisi Reyes – original work.
3. *The Lunch Box* (2009) by Thanapoom Sirichang – adapted from Buddhist morality tale.
4. *Covido The Opera* (2021) by Krisada and Napisi Reyes – original work from Covid-19 era.

This research applies Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist method,²⁶ which analyses narratives by segmenting them into mythemes and organising these into patterns of relationship and oppositions. In this research, mythemes are understood as the smallest meaningful narrative units, typically expressed as simple statements of action, condition, or relationship, including symbolic or supernatural elements. Each opera was analysed using the same step-by-step procedure, which proceeded in three steps:

1. Mytheme identification:

Each narrative was segmented into minimal meaningful units based on libretti, synopses, and available performance materials e.g. "Lamhab rejects Hanao."

²⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 270 (October-December 1955): 428-444, https://www.people.iup.edu/sherwood/Archived-Courses/ENGL752Sull-05/Docs/Structural_Study_of_Myth.pdf.

2. Grouping into binary oppositions:

Mythemes were organised into oppositions expressing narrative tensions such as love/duty, choice/fate, devotion/rejection, and isolation/reconnection.

3. Vertical column arrangement:

Oppositional sets were mapped into structural columns for each opera. This method highlights how events align, reverse or transform within each work.

This approach prioritises relational coherence rather than psychological interpretation or historical origin, ensuring methodological consistency across all four works. The process follows this analysis workflow for each opera: Narrative → Mythemes → Binary Oppositions → Structural Chart → Interpretation.

To ensure consistency across all operas, the same criteria for segmentation and grouping were applied to each, with emphasis placed on patterns that appear across the narratives rather than single, isolated events. Analytical rigour was strengthened by comparing multiple sources for each opera, and by situating interpretations within relevant literature on structuralism, mythology and opera. This approach ensures that the analysis remains consistent, transparent, and grounded in both primary material and theoretical understanding.

Result

Across all operas, the segmented mythemes naturally formed four vertical columns, suggesting a recurring mythic architecture. Each opera also exhibited a movement from tension to mediation, consistent with structuralist models of mythic transformation. In keeping with Lévi-Strauss's method, each chart may be read both left-to-right as a broad sequence of thematic development and top-to-bottom within columns to trace the internal logic of each oppositional set.

Ngau Pa

Ngau Pa reimagines a rural tragedy involving forbidden love and supernatural consequence. The sacred T'akian tree acts as the narrative axis where emotional conflict intersects with cosmic order. Dreams, omens, and tabooed transgressions frame the narrative within a moral cosmology in which personal desire collides with spiritual law.²⁷ Table 1 presents the structural breakdown of the narrative, showing the key oppositions and mediation revealed by the analysis.

²⁷ Fueanglada Prawang, "The Emergence of Thai Opera: Performance as Cultural Synergy" (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2021), 159-160, https://research.bangor.ac.uk/files/37458630/2021_Prawang_PhD_Music_Thesis.pdf.

Table 1 Structural breakdown of Ngau Pa, highlighting key oppositions and their narrative resolution.
 The sacred T’akian tree, central to Thai spiritual belief as a dwelling place of protective spirits,
 functions as a symbolic axis linking human desire with supernatural consequence.

Source: by author

Three bodies are discovered beneath the sacred T’akian tree.	Omen forces villagers to flee.	Sompla loves Lamhab, but she is betrothed to Hanao.	Sompla pledges love to Lamhab through gifts.
			Sompla saves Lamhab from a snake.
Lamhab falls in love with Sompla because he saved her.	Lamhab cries at the T’akian tree because Sompla has not rescued her from marriage.	Lamhab loves Sompla and doesn’t want to marry Hanao.	Sompla takes Lamhab after the wedding.
Hanao is angry and pursues Lamhab.	Sompla dreams he will die, Lamhab believes it’s an omen.	Lamhab begs Sompla not to leave.	Sompla and Hanao fight.
Hanao’s brother shoots Sompla with a blow dart.	The fate implied by the dream is fulfilled as Sompla dies.	Lamhab still loves Sompla.	Lamhab rejects Hanao.
Lamhab kills herself.		Hanao is devastated to know they loved each other, blames himself.	
Hanao kills himself.	All three lovers die together beneath the sacred T’akian tree.		

This sequence expresses the opposition between personal desire and social obligation, resolved through tragic consequence that reasserts a moral order.

The Story of the Long-Gone Animals

This opera follows teenage Dao Nua, whose illness and despair manifest as a dream-journey guided by extinct animals, led by a singing dodo. The dream world functions as a mythical realm of insight where ecological extinction parallels emotional erasure. Upon waking, Dao Nua recommits to life and healing.²⁸ Table 2 summarises the narrative structure, highlighting the oppositions and mediations identified through the analysis.

Table 2 Narrative structure of The Story of the Long-Gone Animals.
The extinct animals, particularly the singing dodo, operate as symbolic guides within a dream-like realm, linking ecological loss with Dao Nua’s emotional and psychological state.

Source: by author

Dao Nua suffers from illness and despair.	Her mother is distraught by her daughter’s illness.	Dao Nua sees her life as a nightmare she wishes to escape.	
Dao Nua has stopped taking medication and given up.	Mother’s lullaby as healing.		Temporary peace through maternal care.
Dao Nua seeks escape in sleep.	Dao Nua disengages from human world.	Singing dodo appears as a spiritual guide; extinct animals act as lost memories.	Dao Nua gains new emotional awareness.
Dao Nua chooses to live and shares her dream.	Friends doubt her story.	Dream is misunderstood by others, significance is personal to Dao Nua.	Dao Nua accepts life and recommits to healing.
	Everyone comes together and appreciates the importance of life.		

This progression organises the opposition between despair and support, resolved through a symbolic journey that enables personal transformation.

²⁸ Fueanglada Prawang, “The Emergence of Thai Opera: Performance as Cultural Synergy” (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2021), 168-169, https://research.bangor.ac.uk/files/37458630/2021_Prawang_PhD_Music_Thesis.pdf.

The Lunch Box

Adapted from a Buddhist morality tale, *The Lunch Box* centres on filial duty. Thong grows resentful toward his mother despite her unwavering devotion. When he angrily strikes her and she dies, her lovingly prepared meal becomes a symbol of irrevocable emotional rupture.²⁹ Table 3 outlines the narrative structure and the oppositional patterns that emerged from the structural analysis of this opera.

Table 3 Mapping of the structural oppositions in *The Lunch Box*, with particular emphasis on the symbolic role of food in Thai culture, as an expression of caring respect and familial obligation. The narrative centres on filial duty and the consequences of its rejection.

Source: by author

Thong resents his mother, blames her for hardship.	Mother quietly supports son, tending to him despite his moods.	Lunch box becomes a symbol of shame and comparison (inferiority).	Emotional distance grows between mother and son.
Thong mocks and rejects his mother’s food.	Mother prepares a better meal, hoping to regain son’s affection.	Food is used as a peace offering (bargaining through nourishment).	Miscommunication and unmet expectations deepen conflict.
	Mother arrives late but still offers the meal.	The abundant meal represents a mother’s unconditional love.	
Thong, tired and frustrated, strikes his mother with a stick.			Tragedy; mother dies, finality of son’s rejection.
Thong eats alone and cannot finish the meal.		Leftover food symbolises son’s regret.	Moral awakening through guilt and grief.

This pattern reflects the opposition between filial rejection and maternal devotion, culminating in a reversal that produces moral awareness.

²⁹ Fueanglada Prawang, “The Emergence of Thai Opera: Performance as Cultural Synergy” (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2021), 182-183, https://research.bangor.ac.uk/files/37458630/2021_Prawang_PhD_Music_Thesis.pdf.

Covido The Opera

Composed during the Covid-19 pandemic, this opera portrays a soprano whose fear leads to total isolation. A singing toy bear becomes a catalyst for reconnection, guiding her through operatic duets and Buddhist chanting until she finally re-enters the world.³⁰ Table 4 shows the narrative structure of *Covido The Opera* and the oppositional patterns that emerged from its structural analysis.

Table 4 Structural analysis of Covido The Opera, composed during the Covid-19 pandemic.
The singing toy bear functions as a symbolic agent of emotional recovery, reflecting themes of isolation and engagement in a contemporary global context.

Source: by author

Soprano seals herself away in her condo and avoids contact.	Someone delivers a strange package.	A singing toy bear arrives and provides an unexpected connection.	The Soprano’s isolation is disrupted.
She remains somewhat fearful and hesitant.	The soprano and the bear connect through opera, singing duets together.		The soprano softens emotionally and opens up.
	The bear attempts to reach her spiritually via chanting.		
She rejects the bear and throws him out of the window.	She looks outside and sees the bear out in the world.		She finally gains the courage to leave the condo.
	The soprano and the bear watch a beautiful sunset together.	The bear has reminded her of the person she was before the pandemic.	She’s no longer isolated and alone.

This structure presents the opposition between isolation and engagement, which is resolved through symbolic intervention and emotional revival.

³⁰ Krisada Reyes and Napisi Reyes, dirs., *Covido The Opera*, 2021, MPEG.

Summary of Structural Analysis

To clarify how the structural analysis operates across all four operas, Table 5 gathers the core findings of the Results section.

This highlights each work's primary binary oppositions, the mechanisms through which these tensions are mediated, and the resulting narrative transformations, illustrating the shared mythic logic that underpins otherwise diverse stories.

Table 5 Synthesis of the structural findings across all four operas, identifying shared binary oppositions, modes of narrative resolution, and key symbolic figures. This chart highlights how diverse stories drawn on similar mythic patterns address both traditional values and global contemporary concerns.

Source: by author

Opera	Binary Oppositions	Structural Mediation	Mediating Figure(s)	Outcome/Narrative Transformation
Ngau Pa	Love vs Duty, Cosmic Order vs Human Desire	Supernatural omens, prophetic dreams, sacred T'akian tree	T'akian tree, prophetic dreams	Tragic fulfilment of fate, communal moral reckoning and restoration of balance
The Story of the Long-Gone Animals	Despair vs Support, Detachment vs Renewal	Dream-journey into a symbolic realm where extinction mirrors inner crisis	Singing dodo, extinct animals	Emotional rebirth, recommitment to life and renewed social connection
The Lunch Box	Filial Rejection vs Maternal Devotion, Nourishment vs Rejection	Food as symbolic labour and moral currency, social notions of face and honour	Mother (and the lunch box as symbol)	Maternal death prompts son's guilt and moral awakening
Covido The Opera	Isolation vs Engagement, Stasis vs Reconnection	Animation of object (toy bear) as catalyst, musical/chanting mediation	Singing toy bear	Recovery from isolation, restoration of identity and social engagement

Across all four operas, a consistent structural pattern emerges in which binary oppositions are introduced, intensified and ultimately resolved through an interceding element. This supports Lévi-Strauss's argument that myth operates through the transformation of oppositions rather than linear progression, reflecting his view that meaning emerges through the relationship between opposing elements rather than individual narrative events. While the specific content varies, from folklore and family conflict to ecological anxiety and pandemic isolation, the underlying structural logic remains paramount, demonstrating the persistence of mythic organisation within contemporary Thai-language opera. These findings demonstrate that modern operatic narratives in Thailand do not depart from traditional modes of meaning construction, but instead reinterpret them within new social and cultural contexts.

Discussion

Following the structural analysis of the four Thai-language operas, summarised in Table 5, clear patterns began to emerge in the arrangement of narrative events and their underlying oppositional relationships.

Mythic Framing in *Ngau Pa*

In *Ngau Pa*, myth operates through the positioning of emotional conflict within a supernatural moral structure, revealing how narrative tension is organised through culturally embedded symbolic systems. The T'akian tree (considered spiritual in Thailand) functions as both a plot device and 'axis mundi', connecting desire and the rejection of duty with cosmic consequences. As Kostiřová explains, building on Eliade's foundational work, the 'axis mundi' operates as a sacred centre through which communication between human and divine realms becomes possible.³¹ In structural terms, this positions the tree as a central node through which opposing forces, love and duty/human desire and cosmic order, are brought into relation. In this context, the omen and T'akian tree are not simply folkloric elements, but function as a structural focal point through which mythic logic organises the relationship between human action and moral consequence. The lovers' union is framed not as a private transgression, but as a rupture in a spiritual order, triggering consequences that extend beyond the individual to the wider community.

The use of a prophetic dream, a common device in Thai folklore, reinforces a structural movement from anticipation to consequence, underscoring the role of fate and karmic inevitability.³² This aligns with Morris's account of northern Thai spiritual ecology, where trees and spirits form part of a system in which human behaviour is interpreted through ongoing interaction with supernatural forces, reinforcing the opera's integration of moral and cosmological order.³³ More broadly, the rejection of familial and social duty in favour of personal desire

³¹ Zuzana Marie Kostiřová, "Axis Mundi in the Tropics: Uses and Abuses of Eliade's Phenomenology of Religion in the Schelean Maya Studies," *Ethnologia Actualis* 19, no. 2 (December 2019): 57-80, <https://doi.org/10.2478/eas-2020-0004>.

³² Thomas E. Lux, "From Dream to Folklore in Northeast Thailand," *Asian Folklore Studies* 30, no. 1 (1971): 85-96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1177766>.

³³ Rosalind C. Morris, *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

reflects a violation of *bunkhun* (a moral economy of gratitude and obligation) which, when breached, invites both social and metaphysical disarray.³⁴ Thus, the tragic culmination displays not only personal downfall but also the restoration of moral balance, illustrating Lévi-Strauss's view that myth resolves oppositions through transformation rather than linear resolution, with consequences extending to the wider community. This finding furthers existing research by demonstrating how such spiritual principles are actively reproduced within contemporary operatic narratives rather than remaining confined to traditional folklore contexts.

Comparative Mythic Parallels: *Ngau Pa* and *Romeo and Juliet*

A clear structural parallel can be identified between *Ngau Pa* and William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, particularly in their use of binary oppositions such as public hatred and private love, as identified in existing research.³⁵ Both works are driven by the opposition between love and duty, which structures the central conflict in each narrative. While *Ngau Pa* articulates this through mythic elements such as omens, prophetic dreams, and the sacred T'akian tree, *Romeo and Juliet* presents a more secular configuration, in which miscommunication and rigid social divisions perform a similar structural function. Despite their differing cultural circumstances, both narratives resolve this opposition through the deaths of the lovers, producing a shared moral reckoning that reflects Lévi-Strauss's view that meaning emerges through relationships between opposing elements.

Musical Framing of Myth in *Ngau Pa*

Ngau Pa's musical design reflects its central oppositions through orchestration, extending structural contrasts into the music domain despite the limitations of partial performance and missing recordings. Srikanonda's incorporation of three pre-existing songs reinforces the shared lament of the central characters, aligning musical repetition with the opera's tragic resolution.³⁶ The use of traditional Thai instruments situates the work culturally, while the contrast between fixed melodies and responsive orchestral textures expresses oppositions such as love and duty. The inclusion of Buddhist prayers further integrates spiritual and ethical dimensions into the work's structure, demonstrating how musical organisation, like narrative form, participates in the construction of meaning.

³⁴ Niels Mulder, *Inside Thai Society: Interpretations of Everyday Life* (Amsterdam: Pepin, 1996). <https://archive.org/details/insidethaisociet0000muld>.

³⁵ Halit Alkan, "A Structuralist Analysis of William Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet,'" *Journal of Kesit Academy* 7, no. 27 (June 2021): 27-36, <https://doi.org/10.29228/kesit.51211>.

³⁶ Fueanglada Prawang, "The Emergence of Thai Opera: Performance as Cultural Synergy" (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2021), 155-163, https://research.bangor.ac.uk/files/37458630/2021_Prawang_PhD_Music_Thesis.pdf.

Mental Health and Extinction Anxiety in *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals*

The Story of the Long-Gone Animals confers growing concerns around climate change, sustainability and species extinction, embedding these issues within its narrative structure.³⁷ Its tale links species extinction to Dao Nua's illness and psychological stress, positioning her emotional isolation as a parallel form of loss. Through Dao Nua's refusal of treatment and withdrawal from the social world, the opera engages with mental health concerns among Thai youth, a growing issue in both academic and public discourse.³⁸ Studies indicate that Thai adolescents experiencing depression face significant declines in emotional well-being, reinforcing the relevance of this theme within opera.³⁹ This is further contextualised by research linking modern factors, such as smartphone use, to rising levels of depression.⁴⁰ In contrast, the mother functions as a stabilising counterpart to Dao Nua's despair, and her lullaby channels the emotional strain of single parenthood, where economic demands limit the capacity for care.⁴¹ These elements reinforce the opposition between despair and support, allowing current social and psychological concerns to be expressed through the narrative.

Heroic Descent and Return in *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals*

Although *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals* is an original work, its narrative follows a recognisable pattern of descent and return. Dao Nua's dream journey into a realm shaped by extinction mirrors traditions in which a protagonist enters an alternative world and returns transformed. This is a structure emulated in Orpheus-type narratives⁴² and shamanic dream-vision accounts,⁴³ where the extinct animals, led by the singing

³⁷ Guido Buenstorf and Christian Cordes, "Can Sustainable Consumption Be Learned? A Model of Cultural Evolution," *Ecological Economics* 67, no. 4 (November 2008): 646-657, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2008.01.028>; Joanne L. Isaac, "Effects of Climate Change on Life History: Implications for Extinction Risk in Mammals," *Endangered Species Research* 7 (May 2009): 115-123, <https://doi.org/10.3354/esr00093>; Andrew R. Jones, "The Next Mass Extinction: Human Evolution or Human Eradication," *Journal of Cosmology* 2 (2009): 316-333, <https://thejournalofcosmology.com/Extinction108.html>.

³⁸ Jesadakorn Ransri, "Mental Health and Well-Being of Thai Youth: Addressing the Growing Crisis," *Journal of Modern Academic Social Science (Online)* 1, no. 2 (March-April 2024): 14-25, https://so19.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/J_ASS/article/view/754.

³⁹ Paul Ratanasiripong et al., "Predictors of Mental Health among Secondary School Students in Thailand: The Roles of Grit, Self Esteem, and Smartphone Addiction," *Thai Journal of Public Health* 54, no. 2 (May-August 2024): 903-910, https://www.ph.mahidol.ac.th/thjph/journal/54_2/05.pdf.

⁴⁰ Jon D. Elhai et al., "Problematic Smartphone Use: A Conceptual Overview and Systematic Review of Relations with Anxiety and Depression Psychopathology," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 207 (January 2016): 251-259, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2016.08.030>.

⁴¹ Ronald T. Brown et al., "Single Parents of Children with Chronic Illness: An Understudied Phenomenon," *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 33, no. 4 (May 2008): 408-421, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsm079>; René Landero Hernández, Benito Estrada Aranda, and Mónica Teresa González Ramírez, "Depression and Quality of Life for Women in Single-Parent and Nuclear Families," *The Spanish Journal of Psychology* 12, no. 1 (May 2009): 171-183, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S113874160000158X>.

⁴² Laura I. H. Beattie, "Retelling Orpheus: Orpheus in the Renaissance," *Analyses/Rereadings/Theories: A Journal Devoted to Literature, Film and Theatre* 2, no. 1 (2014): 1-8, <https://doi.org/10.18778/2353-6098.2.01>; Randa Abdelfattah Mohamed Misbah, "The Significance of Orpheus's Myth in Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*: An Intertextual Approach," *Faculty of Arts Journal* 81, no. 4 (April 2021): 43-67, <http://search.mandumah.com/Record/1182805>.

⁴³ Roger Walsh, "Shamanic Experiences: A Developmental Analysis," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 41, no. 3 (2001): 31-52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167801413004>.

dodo, function as guides who facilitate this transition. The narrative also aligns with Buddhist storytelling, in which suffering leads to insight and renewed empathic awareness.⁴⁴ This movement from detachment to renewal further parallels Joseph Campbell's model of departure, initiation, and return,⁴⁵ though here expressed through a contemporary psychological and ecological lens. Rather than replicating a single tradition, the opera draws on these shared narrative patterns to structure Dao Nua's transformation from despair to obtaining a renewed engagement with life.

Musical Characterisation in *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals*

The opera's use of distinct musical motifs for each animal reinforces their symbolic role within Dao Nua's transformation, with variation in timbre and instrumentation giving each figure a clear expressive identity. For instance, while the Xerces blue butterfly is characterised by a wide orchestral range, including the bright and piercing piccolo to evoke its beauty and elegant flight, Steller's sea cow is represented through the use of trombones and a slow adagio tempo to present its unhurried underwater movement (see Figure 1).

37

Stellar's Sea Cow 1:00

456 Adagio ♩=60

Figure 1 Steller's sea cow within *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals* score, utilising trombones and an adagio tempo.

Source: Excerpt from Krisada Reyes and Napisi Reyes, *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals* Score. Used with permission.⁴⁶

This musical differentiation supports the structural opposition between despair and support by framing the animals not simply as narrative elements, but as vehicles of emotional and psychological transformation, reinforcing the idea that each creature is unique and contributes in its own way to the world, as is the case with Dao Nua.

Familial Duty and Rejection in *The Lunch Box*

The Lunch Box shifts away from overtly supernatural elements, grounding its narrative in domestic conflict while maintaining a clear structural opposition between filial rejection and maternal devotion. As with *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals*, the mother's sustained care contrasts with Thong's growing resentment, producing an imbalance that culminates in a reversal where his rejection of her care leads to irreversible loss.

⁴⁴ Anindita Sinh, "The Jataka Tales through the Lens of Existential and Buddhist Ethics," *Confluence: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4 (2020): 31-46, <https://cjdids.in/volume-iv-2020/the-jataka-theses-through-the-lens-of-existential-and-buddhist-ethics/>.

⁴⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008).

⁴⁶ Krisada Reyes and Napisi Reyes, "The Story of the Long-Gone Animals, Act 2: Transposed Score," unpublished score, 2021, 37.

Within a Thai cultural setting, this conflict challenges expectations of familial and community responsibility,⁴⁷ echoing *Ngau Pa*, where the rejection of social obligation similarly leads to destructive consequences. Such expectations extend across many Asian cultures, where filial responsibility persists among emigrant families,⁴⁸ may be formalised through legislation such as Singapore's Maintenance of Parents Act,⁴⁹ and is increasingly reshaped by changing family structures, including greater reliance on community or state-supported care and the growing emphasis on material provision.⁵⁰ In this context, the opera frames filial failure not simply as personal conflict but as a broader moral and social rupture of expectations.

Structurally, the narrative demonstrates how the breakdown of reciprocal obligation leads to an outcome shaped by consequence rather than reconciliation, supporting Lévi-Strauss's view that narrative significance arises through the reconfiguration of opposing states.

The Symbolism of Food, Face, and Emotional Labour in *The Lunch Box*

Food operates as the central symbolic medium through which care, obligation, and social identity are expressed in *The Lunch Box*. Within Thai culture, the preparation and sharing of food functions as an act of emotional labour and a primary expression of familial devotion, particularly among older generations who derive purpose from caregiving roles.⁵¹ Even the common Thai greeting, 'Have you eaten rice yet?' operates as a social marker of well-being, replacing the more individualistic 'How are you?' in other societies.⁵² Within this context, the mother's preparation of meals represents not only sustenance, but a sustained investment in relational obligation. This symbolism is intensified by the cultural logic of *face*, in which social perception, dignity, and emotional restraint shape interpersonal behaviour.⁵³ Thong's embarrassment over his modest meal, particularly in a communal setting, positions food as a marker of social status and self-worth; a site of tension between care

⁴⁷ Patcharawalai Wongboonsin, Yupin Aungsuruch, and Naomi Hatsukano, "The Ageing Society and Human Resources to Care for the Older People in Thailand," in *Human Resources for the Health and Long-term Care of Older Persons in Asia*, ed. Yuko Tsujita and Osuke Komazawa (Jakarta: Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and Asia, 2020), 104-135, https://www.ide.go.jp/library/English/Publish/Reports/EC/pdf/202011_ch04.pdf.

⁴⁸ Shui Sum Lau, "Filial Piety and U.S. Family Law: How Cultural Values Influence Caregiving, End-of-Life, and Estate Planning Decisions in Asian American Families," *Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 123-144, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48743281>.

⁴⁹ "Maintenance of Parents Act 1995," Government of Singapore, Singapore Statutes Online, last modified 2024, <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/MPA1995>.

⁵⁰ Luechai Sringernyuang and Tida Sottiyotin, "'Ya Luk Ka Tan Yoo': An Ethnography of Filial Piety Culture, Medication Usage, and Health Perceptions of the Elderly in Rural Southern Thailand," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 19 (October-1 2022): 12134, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912134>.

⁵¹ Patcharee Komjakraphan and Wannee Chansawang, "The Lived Experience of Living in Skipped-Generation Household among Southern Thai Elders," *Journal of Research in Nursing-Midwifery and Health Sciences* 35, no. 3 (September-December 2015): 35-56, <https://he02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/nur-psu/article/view/44341>.

⁵² Ratiwan Watanasin, "Central Thai Food Culture and Acculturation During World War ii and the Vietnam War," *Manusya, Journal of Humanities* 23, no. 2 (2020): 205-223, <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/manusya/vol23/iss2/4>.

⁵³ David Young, "The Hierarchy of Thailand and its Effects on English Language Learning," *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network* 14, no. 1 (January-June 2021): 15-27, <https://so04.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/LEARN/article/view/248675>.

and shame. As studies of Thai social life indicate, shared meals reinforce social cohesion, while eating alone signals isolation,⁵⁴ further deepening the symbolic weight of Thong's rejection.

At the same time, the mother's attempt to provide a more elaborate meal can be read as an effort to restore both relational and social balance, even as this delay precipitates the narrative's tragic outcome. Structurally, the lunch box itself becomes the key object through which the central opposition between maternal devotion and filial rejection is represented. Its rejection marks a reversal of its intended function, converting it from a symbol of care into an emblem of destructive denial.

Cross-Cultural Moral Parallels of Filial Failure in *The Lunch Box*

The narrative of *The Lunch Box* parallels several tales in which the failure of filial obligation leads to moral and emotional consequence. Comparable structures appear in *King Lear*, where misjudgement within the parent-child relationship results in loss and estrangement,⁵⁵ and in the *Śyāma Jātaka*, which presents an idealised model of filial devotion in Buddhist ethics.⁵⁶ Similarly, the Grimm tale *The Old Man and His Grandson*, frames neglect of an elder as a moral failing.⁵⁷

Across these examples, the tension between care and rejection shapes narrative outcomes through the presence or absence of mutual obligation. In contrast to partial resolution or moral correction, *The Lunch Box* intensifies this structural pattern by resolving the conflict through fatal consequence, which reinforces the cost of filial failure within its cultural setting.

Musical Expression of Filial Conflict in *The Lunch Box*

This theme of filial failure is represented within the structure of the musical choices too, where fluid melodic and rhythmic motifs reflect the interplay between the son's rejection and maternal devotion, particularly in the duet between parent and child. As their emotions clash, the music abandons the previously soothing harmonies, introducing abrupt percussion and sharp accents that highlight the son's rising anger. The juxtaposition of traditional Thai instruments with Western orchestration symbolises the tension between Thong and his mother, and more broadly, the binary oppositions between parental devotion and the rejection of traditional Thai values. In this way, the musical composition reinforces the narrative conflict by aligning orchestral contrast with emotional and relational breakdown.

⁵⁴ Vasoontara Yiengprugsawan et al., "Health, Happiness and Eating Together: What Can a Large Thai Cohort Study Tell Us?," *Global Journal of Health Science* 7, no. 4 (2015): 270-277, <https://doi.org/10.5539/gjhs.v7n4p270>.

⁵⁵ Suneetha Yedla and Mahmood Hasan Al-Khazaali, "Filial Relationships in Shakespeare's *King Lear*," *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies* 3, no. 3 (July-September 2016): 602-605, <http://www.ijelr.in/3.3.16c/602-605%20Dr.%20SUNEETHA%20YEDLA.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Jinchao Zhao, "Filial Piety in Fluidity: The Tension between the Textual and Visual Traditions of *Śyāma Jātaka* in Early Medieval China," *Religions* 14, no. 7 (2023): 860, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14070860>.

⁵⁷ Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Old Man and His Grandson," in *Grimms' Tales for Young and Old: The Complete Stories*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), 263-264.

Pandemic Anxiety and Psychological Stasis in *Covido The Opera*

Covido The Opera situates its central conflict within the psychological effects of pandemic isolation, where prolonged withdrawal produces a state of emotional stasis, something that teachers or parents should be vigilant to identify in children.⁵⁸ The opposition between isolation and engagement is established through the soprano's self-imposed confinement, which functions both as protection and as a barrier to connection.

This condition reflects wider patterns of mental health strain associated with Covid-19,⁵⁹ as well as continued social stigma surrounding depression in Thailand.⁶⁰ Rather than presenting isolation as fixed, the narrative treats it as a condition subject to disruption, allowing psychological distress to be expressed through cycles of withdrawal and re-engagement.

Myths of Transformation and Emotional Renewal in *Covido The Opera*

The progression from isolation to engagement in *Covido The Opera* replicates a wider mythic pattern in which stasis gives way to reconnection. While parallels can be drawn with narratives such as *Rapunzel* and *Sleeping Beauty*, where the soprano enters a metaphorical dormancy through a state of emotional stasis,⁶¹ the opera's use of an animated object as a guiding presence more closely aligns with traditions such as *tsukumogami* of Japanese folklore, where objects that have absorbed emotional energy come to life with spirit and agency.⁶² This is also replicated with the concept of *āveśa* in Asian tantric traditions, where a deity's power enters an object to bring healing or change,⁶³ and the myth of Pandora, where contained or inanimate forms become carriers of a disruptive force.⁶⁴

Rather than relying on external rescue, the narrative adapts this pattern to a contemporary psychological context, presenting recovery as emerging through renewed social connection, a structure shared by both *The Story of the Long-Gone Animals* and *Covido The Opera*, which employ fantastical guiding figures whose interventions prompt shifts in the protagonists' understanding and behaviour.

⁵⁸ Nishtha Chawla et al., "Psychological Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Adolescents: A Systematic Review," *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine* 43, no. 4 (July 2021): 294-299, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02537176211021789>.

⁵⁹ Wiriya Mahikul et al., "Mental Health Status and Quality of Life Among Thai People after the COVID-19 Outbreak: A Cross-Sectional Study," *Scientific Reports* 14 (2024): 25896, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-77077-3>.

⁶⁰ Jidapa Pruksarungruang and Douglas Rhein, "Depression Literacy: An Analysis of the Stigmatization of Depression in Thailand," *SAGE Open* 12, no. 4 (October-December 2022): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221140376>.

⁶¹ Seungyeon Lee, "Enchanted or Endangered by Sleep? Modern Interpretation of the Heroine's Consciousness in Tales of Sleeping Beauty (Transformations by Anne Sexton and Beginning with O by Olga Broumas)," *Interdisciplinary Humanities: Beyond the Binary* 33, no. 2 (2016): 121-136.

⁶² Noriko T. Reider, "Animating Objects: *Tsukumogami ki* and the Medieval Illustration of Shingon Truth," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (2009): 231-257, <https://scispace.com/pdf/animating-objects-tsukumogami-ki-and-the-medieval-2gwuc9qlkq.pdf>.

⁶³ Vikas Malhotra, "Āveśa and Deity Possession in the Tantric Traditions of South Asia: History, Evolution, and Etiology" (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2022), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1sp3k2wk>.

⁶⁴ Harold P. Blum, "A Psychoanalytic Enquiry into Pandora's Box: Symbol and Metaphor," in *Language, Symbolization, and Psychosis*, ed. Giovanna Ambrosio, Simona Argentieri, and Jorge Canestri (London: Routledge, 2007), 18-30. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429476570-2>.

Musical Devices of Reconnection in *Covido The Opera*

Along this theme, the opera musically interweaves contemporary harmonies and electronic motifs to trace the emotional contours of the modern pandemic, incorporating familiar, traditional operatic duets to symbolically rejuvenate the soprano's artistic identity and lull her from isolation. Buddhist chanting is also integrated into the libretto as a culturally resonant mechanism of collective healing for the soprano and audience alike, with the oppositions of stasis versus reconnection present throughout.

Limitations

Taken together, these findings contribute to existing scholarship by demonstrating that structuralist analysis remains a productive method for interpreting contemporary Southeast Asian performance practices, particularly in emerging operatic repertoires where narrative structure continues to shape the communication of cultural values.

Though, while providing valuable insight into narrative patterning and cultural meaning, it may reduce narrative complexity and limit attention to historical context, performance practice and authorial intent. This study is further constrained by the small number of available Thai-language operas, which restricts the scope for broader generalisation. As a result, the findings should be understood as indicative rather than comprehensive, reflecting patterns within a limited but representative sample. Future research may address these limitations by examining newly composed works or by applying complementary analytical approaches, such as performance analysis or audience reception studies, to provide a more integrated understanding.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Thai-language opera consistently employs recurring mythic structures in which binary oppositions are introduced, intensified, and resolved through symbolic intervention. Across the four operas analysed, these structural patterns reveal how traditional cultural values remain active within contemporary narratives that address modern social concerns, including environmental change, mental health, and social isolation. The findings therefore show that inherited narrative logic continues to shape meaning within a developing operatic tradition, allowing contemporary issues to be expressed through familiar cultural forms.

By applying Lévi-Straussian structuralist analysis to a contemporary Southeast Asian repertoire, this research extends the relevance of structuralism beyond its established Western contexts and positions Thai-language opera as a significant site for ethnomusicological inquiry. In doing so, it contributes to understanding Thai-language opera as both an evolving artistic form and a cultural medium through which continuity and change are negotiated, demonstrating the continued analytical value of structuralist approaches in examining current performance practices.

Future research could build on these findings by examining newly composed Thai-language operas to determine whether similar structural patterns persist as the repertoire expands. Comparative studies involving other Southeast Asian operas would help clarify regional similarities and differences in mythic organisation and narrative structure. In addition, integrating performance analysis and audience reception studies would provide insight into how structural meaning is realised in live performance and interpreted by contemporary audiences. Such directions would support a more comprehensive understanding of Thai-language opera, both as a narrative system and a lived cultural practice.

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