

流動之聲： 泰國鄉村音樂 (*Luk Thung*) 中的 性別化移動情感

樊夏^{*}

國立政治大學

摘要

本文探討泰國鄉村音樂 *luk thung* (เพลงลูกทุ่ง) 如何媒介二十世紀後半葉泰國城鄉轉型下的移動經驗。本文主張，*luk thung* 可被視為一種「聲音檔案」(sonic archive)，透過聲音使遷移、鄉愁、離散與社會變遷得以被文化性地聽見。透過對 1950 至 1980 年代四首歌曲的細讀，包括以男性聲音為主的遷移分離歌曲與 *phleng kae* (เพลงแก้ , 應答歌曲) 對唱形式，本文分析聲音、樂器聲響、地方性唱腔與聲音記憶如何保存與鄉村離鄉及都市工業生活相關的情感經驗。

本文進一步指出，男性與女性歌者透過不同的聽覺與敘事策略協商移動經驗。〈Klap Thoet Riam Cha〉與〈Siang Khlui Riak Nang〉等男性主唱歌曲，透過呼喚式唱腔、環境聲景以及泰國竹笛 *Khlui* 的象徵性聲音，呈現對鄉土、地方記憶與家園依附的情感。相對地，Chanthana 對唱歌曲則透過聲音對話、延遲回應與跨越都市工業距離的想像性聆聽，建構親密關係與遷移距離。本文特別關注可辨識的聲音質地、地方口音與口傳音樂實踐如何形塑現代泰國的遷移聆聽文化。

本文並不將遷移僅視為人口移動現象，而是將其理解為一種透過聲音、聆聽與記憶所媒介的聽覺與情感狀態。藉此，本文將 *luk thung* 音樂定位為一種語言文化與聲音實踐，使遷移者得以在都市化與離散過程中，持續維繫其人際關係、地方感與社會身份的連續性。

關鍵詞：泰國鄉村音樂、泰國內部遷移、移動情感、性別表演性、大眾音樂與遷移

^{*} 國立政治大學東南亞語文學系助理教授

Sounding Migration: Gender Affects of Mobility in Thai Country Music (*Luk Thung*)

Chawarote Valyamedhi *

National Chengchi University

Abstract

This article examines how *luk thung* songs (เพลงลูกทุ่ง, Thai country music) mediate experiences of mobility generated by Thailand's rural-urban transformation during the second half of the twentieth century. The study argues that *luk thung* functions as a sonic archive through which migration, longing, displacement, and social change become culturally audible. Through close readings of four songs from the 1950s-1980s—including male-voiced songs of migratory separation and selected *phleng kae* (เพลงจั่ว, answer-song) duets—the article analyzes how voice, instrumental sound, regional vocality, and sonic memory preserve emotional experiences associated with rural departure and urban-industrial life.

The analysis demonstrates how male and female singers negotiate mobility through distinct auditory and narrative strategies. Male-voiced songs such as “Klap Thoet Riam Cha” and “Siang Khlui Riak Nang” articulate longing, remembered locality, and attachment to rural home through vocal calling, environmental soundscape, and the symbolic role of *khlui* (Thai bamboo flute). In contrast, the Chanthana duet musical repertoire stages intimacy and migratory distance through dialogic vocal exchange, delayed correspondence, and imagined listening across urban-industrial separation. Particular attention is given to the role of

* Assistant Professor of Department of Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures, National Chengchi University

recognizable vocal textures, regional pronunciation, and oral musicianship in shaping migratory listening cultures within modern Thailand.

Rather than treating migration solely as demographic movement, this study approaches mobility as an auditory and emotional condition mediated through voice, sound, listening, and memory. In doing so, the article positions *luk thung* music as a linguistic-cultural and sonic practice through which migrants sustain continuity with relationships, locality, and social identity amid displacement and urban transformation.

Keywords: *luk thung* song, Thai internal migration, affects of mobility, gendered affect, popular music and migration

1. Introduction¹

Across the second half of the twentieth century, internal migration reshaped Thailand's demographic landscape while generating new acoustic experiences of longing, displacement, and mobility. As rural migrants moved toward Bangkok and other urban-industrial centers, experiences of uncertainty and social transition became increasingly mediated through popular music. Among the most important cultural forms emerging from this historical shift was *luk thung* (ลูกทุ่ง, Thai country music), which developed in the post-WWII period as a major cultural expression of rural Thailand during the nation's transition from an agrarian society to an industrializing economy centered in Bangkok. *Luk thung* musical repertoire carried rural voices, regional accents, emotional memory, and sonic textures associated with migration and urban transformation.

For many rural migrants—particularly young women entering textile and garment factories on Bangkok's periphery—the capital city represented a double-edged horizon: a site of economic opportunity as well as cultural displacement, class discrimination, and moral scrutiny (Mills). Migration in this context exceeded demographic movement alone. It became a broader condition of mobility through which rural subjects encountered new economic regimes, social hierarchies, and emotional pressures. Ethnomusicological scholarship has long emphasized that music provides a space where social identities and collective experiences are articulated and negotiated (Stokes). *Luk thung* songs gave voice to these experiences, revealing how migration reshaped intimacy, dignity, and gendered expectations through vocal expression, lyrical address, and performance.

In this article, the phrase “affects of mobility” refers to the emotional orientations—such as longing, uncertainty, estrangement, and moral negotiation—that emerge through migration and social movement. Mobility is therefore understood not simply as physical movement, but as an entanglement of movement, representation, listening, and embodied practice (Ahmed; Cresswell).

Within this landscape of mobility and urban transformation, *luk thung* songs became a crucial medium through which migration was made

¹ This article forms part of a broader research project on migration and Thai popular music. While the author has explored related themes elsewhere, the present study develops a distinct analytical framework centered on affect theory, gendered performativity, and the concept of the sonic archive.

audible. The music preserved emotional histories often absent from official narratives, not through statistical accounts of migration, but through vocal timbre, regional accents, musical texture, and lyrical address. This article examines how *luk thung* music operates as a “sonic archive” (Ochoa Gautier), encoding the affective dimensions of migration through sound and performance.

Through close readings of songs centered on migratory separation, rural longing, factory labor, and urban courtship—including “Klap Thoet Riam Cha” (กลับเถิดเรียมจ๋า, *Please Come Back, My Dear Riam*) (1950s) and “Siang Khlui Riak Nang” (เสียงขลุ่ยเรียกนาง, *Flute Melody Calling the Girl Back*) (1971), alongside selected *phleng kae* (เพลงแก้, answer-song) duets—the analysis explores how voice, instrumental sound, sonic memory, and gendered narration mediate experiences of mobility within modern Thailand.

While my recent study examined *luk thung* through the affective formation of working-class subjectivity during Thailand’s industrial transition, the present article focuses more specifically on sonic mediation, vocal performance, and the auditory dimensions of mobility and gendered displacement.

1.1. Theoretical Positioning and Contribution

While existing scholarship on *luk thung*—particularly James Mitchell’s work on political economy and cultural history (Mitchell), alongside Pattana Kitiarsa’s discussions of migrant manhood and rural male identity in Thai popular music (Kitiarsa)—has established the genre’s importance within modern Thai society, less attention has been given to how migration and mobility are mediated through voice, sound, and auditory exchange. These perspectives are crucial for understanding how rural migrants negotiate emotional life, social identity, intimacy, and moral expectation through musical and vocal expression. This article approaches *luk thung* songs as a site of sonic mediation in which mobility becomes audible through voice, lyrical address, musical texture, and performance. Drawing on Ahmed’s theorization of affect, the analysis examines how collective feelings—including longing, anxiety, estrangement, and dignity—circulate through song and listening practices (Ahmed). At the same time, Butler’s concept of performativity (Butler) helps illuminate how male and female singers negotiate mobility through distinct vocal and narrative strategies under changing social conditions. To develop this argument, the article makes three related contributions:

1.1.1. Performativity and Mobility

The study applies performativity theory to show how *luk thung* songs function as cultural scripts through which migrants negotiate gendered expectations, emotional vulnerability, and social identity across the rural-urban divide.

1.1.2. Dialogic Gendered Voice

The analysis examines *phleng kae* (เพลงแขก, answering-song) musical repertoire as dialogic musical forms through which women respond to male-voiced narratives, negotiating intimacy, caution, and moral authority within conditions of migration and urban modernity.

1.1.3. Sonic Archive and Vocality

Drawing on Ana María Ochoa Gautier's concept of the sonic archive (Ochoa Gautier), the article explores how vocal timbre, regional accents, lyrical delivery, and musical texture preserve emotional histories of migration often absent from official historical narratives.

By foregrounding voice, listening, and dialogic song forms, this study contributes to language and linguistic-cultural studies by demonstrating how migration and social difference are negotiated through vocal performance and mediated sound. *Luk thung* music thus emerges as a socially embedded auditory practice through which the affects of mobility become culturally audible.

1.2. Structure of the Paper

Following this introduction, Section 2 outlines the methodology and analytical framework, focusing on performativity, sonic mediation, listening practices, and the concept of the sonic archive as applied to selected *luk thung* songs. Sections 3 and 4 establish the historical and sonic contexts of migration, media circulation, and Bangkok's position within Thailand's auditory imagination. Sections 5 and 6 then examine how mobility, longing, intimacy, and migratory separation are mediated through vocality, musical texture, and dialogic exchange within male-voiced songs and *phleng kae* repertoires. Section 7 synthesizes these discussions through the framework of the sonic archive, emphasizing how voice, listening, and musical sound preserve migratory memory and auditory continuity within modern Thailand. Finally, the conclusion reflects on *luk thung* music as a cultural medium through which mobility, memory, and social transformation become audible through sound and listening.

2. Methodology: Song Selection and Analytical Approach

The methodology proceeds in two distinct yet integrated parts. The first defines the criteria for song selection, prioritizing iconic musical texts that best exemplify the historical and gendered dynamics of the rural-urban divide during the period of peak internal migration. The second part details the analytical approach, which applies three theoretical lenses—performativity, affect theory, and the sonic archive concept—to the selected musical texts.

2.1. Song Selection

This study employs a methodology centered on interpretive analysis of lyrical narration, vocal delivery, and musical texture, guided by a historically grounded theoretical framework. The analysis focuses on *luk thung* songs produced between the late 1950s and the 1980s, a formative period marked by large-scale internal migration, rapid urban expansion, and the consolidation of *luk thung* music as a nationally recognized popular genre.

The four songs selected for analysis were chosen according to three criteria: (1) their canonical status and wide circulation within *luk thung* music history, (2) their engagement with migration, mobility, and rural-urban transition, and (3) their capacity to articulate contrasting gendered experiences through voice, lyrical address, and musical narration. Together, these songs form a focused corpus through which the sonic and performative dimensions of mobility may be examined.

The selected songs fall into two analytically related groups. First, “Klap Thoet Riam Cha” and “Siang Khloi Riak Nang” present male-voiced narratives of migratory separation and rural longing, emphasizing remembered locality, attachment to home, and emotional distance through vocal calling, instrumental sound, and rural auditory imagery. Second, “Chanthana Thi Rak” (ฉันทนาก็รัก, *My Beloved Chanthana*) and its *phleng kae* reply “Chanthana Top Rak” (ฉันทนาคอบรัก, *Chanthana Replies to Love*) shift the setting toward urban-industrial life, staging a dialogic negotiation of intimacy, listening, and migratory distance through alternating male and female vocal exchange.

These songs are representative not because they encompass the full diversity of *luk thung* music, but because they illuminate distinct auditory approaches to migration and mobility within modern Thailand. Collectively, they demonstrate how voice, musical texture, dialogic

exchange, and sonic memory mediate experiences of distance, intimacy, and migratory listening across rural and urban environments.

Because this study focuses primarily on voice, sound, listening practices, and auditory mediation, lyrical excerpts are reproduced selectively according to their analytical relevance rather than comprehensively for every song discussed. Full lyrics are included primarily for shorter songs in which vocal calling and sonic imagery can be examined as integrated structures, while longer dialogic works such as the Chanthana duet are discussed through selected excerpts most directly related to migratory listening, vocal correspondence, and mediated intimacy. Earlier discussions of the Chanthana duet and its relationship to gendered migration and emotional experience appear in Chawarote Valyamedhi's work on estrangement and working-class emotional convergence in *luk thung* songs (Valyamedhi).

2.2. Analytical Approach

The analytical approach integrates cultural anthropology, ethnomusicology, and performance theory through interpretive analysis of lyrical narration, vocal delivery, and musical texture. Rather than treating songs as passive reflections of migration, the study examines how *luk thung* music mediates experiences of mobility through sound, listening, vocality, and dialogic exchange.

2.2.1. Performativity and Vocal Address

Drawing on Butler's concept of performativity, the analysis approaches songs as performative acts (Butler) through which singers negotiate gendered identities, intimacy, and social expectation through speech, vocal address, and lyrical positioning. Particular attention is given to apologies, promises, hesitation, repetition, and cautious language as vocal strategies through which migrants articulate attachment, uncertainty, and mediated forms of emotional communication across distance.

2.2.2. Affects of Mobility and Listening Practices

Drawing on Ahmed's (2004) theorization of affect, the study approaches migration as an embodied and relational condition shaped through circulation, attachment, and listening practices. Feelings such as longing, estrangement, uncertainty, shame, and dignity are examined as socially mediated orientations emerging through movement and displacement. Within *luk thung* music, these affects circulate through repetition, remembered sound, vocal familiarity, lyrical narration, and shared

listening across dispersed audiences. The analysis therefore focuses not only on emotional expression itself, but also on the auditory conditions through which migratory experience becomes culturally recognizable.

2.2.3. Sonic Archive

The analysis further examines how vocal timbre, regional pronunciation, melodic phrasing, and instrumental sound—including *khloi* (ขลุ่ย, Thai bamboo flute)—preserve migratory memory through sonic expression and auditory circulation (Ochoa Gautier, 2014). Particular attention is given to the role of voice as an auditory medium of emotional communication, especially in songs such as “Klap Thoet Riam Cha,” where migratory separation is mediated through direct vocal calling and imagined hearing across distance. The study also examines how recognizable vocal textures, environmental soundscapes, and mediated musical forms sustain auditory associations with locality, distance, and rural attachment within contexts of urban transformation. In addition, instruments such as *khloi*, although historically associated with Thai court ensembles, became increasingly linked to representations of rural and peasant life through twentieth-century popular media and listening culture.

Throughout this article, Bangkok is treated as Thailand’s primary political, economic, and cultural center and as a major destination within twentieth-century internal migration. While the rural–urban divide forms an important historical backdrop to these movements, the analysis focuses more specifically on how mobility becomes culturally audible through voice, instrumental sound, listening practices, and sonic memory.

Together, these concepts guide close readings of historically situated musical texts, emphasizing how voice, sound, and auditory mediation shape experiences of migration, intimacy, and social transformation within modern Thai society.

3. Historical and Cultural Context of *Luk Thung* Songs

The emergence of *luk thung* music as a nationally recognized genre was closely connected to the expansion of internal migration, mass media circulation, and urban transformation in mid-twentieth-century Thailand. Between the 1960s and the 1980s, large numbers of migrants from regions such as the Central Plains, the Northeast (Isan), and the South moved toward Bangkok, which functioned as the country’s primary political, economic, and cultural center. These movements were shaped by industrial expansion, Cold War geopolitics, and state-led development

policies that intensified connections between provincial and urban life (Mitchell).

These migratory movements also transformed patterns of cultural circulation and listening throughout Thailand. Expanding transportation networks, particularly the Mittraphap Highway constructed during the early 1960s, connected the Northeastern region with Bangkok and facilitated the circulation of labor, media, and popular music across regions. Extending across Isan—Thailand's largest region, covering approximately 167,718 square kilometers—the highway linked rural provincial communities more directly to the kingdom's socio-economic center. The name *Mittraphap* ("friendship") reflected the Cold War context of the project, which was funded largely through United States support (Keyes 56). Although the highway symbolized modernization and national integration, the economic benefits of development remained unevenly distributed throughout the Northeast. As Charles F. Keyes observed, large-scale development projects often appeared distant from the everyday realities of many villagers. (Keyes 57) Improved transportation therefore not only strengthened state and media networks, but also enabled increasing numbers of Northeastern migrants to travel toward Bangkok and other expanding urban-industrial centers in search of employment and economic opportunities unavailable in their hometowns.

Alongside these infrastructural transformations, radio broadcasting, film, and later television enabled *luk thung* songs to circulate widely among migrant audiences whose everyday lives were increasingly shaped by movement between rural hometowns and urban workplaces. In this context, *luk thung* music emerged as an important auditory medium through which mobility, distance, memory, and attachment to home became culturally mediated through sound and listening.

While these developments reinforced distinctions between Bangkok and the provinces within Thailand's modern "geo-body" (Winichakul), the present study approaches such divisions primarily as historical and social conditions underlying migration and media circulation. The analysis focuses more specifically on how *luk thung* songs transformed these experiences into forms of sonic narration, auditory memory, and listening practice. Earlier discussions of the Chanthana duet have emphasized its relationship to migration and industrial-era social change in Thailand (Valyamedhi). Building on that foundation, the present analysis focuses more specifically on mediated intimacy, dialogic vocal exchange, and the sonic dimensions of *phleng kae* within contexts of migratory separation and listening.

3.1. The Urban Paradox: Naming and Cultural Tension

Although the music circulated widely through radio and film during the 1950s, the term *phleng luk thung* emerged through Bangkok's media industry, reflecting the genre's complex relationship with urban cultural institutions. In late 1964, a televised variety program featuring this music was officially renamed *Phleng Luk Thung* (เพลงลูกทุ่ง, Songs of the Fields) by Channel 4 Bangkhunphrom (Chaiyaphiphat).

The naming generated debate among early television audiences, particularly within middle- and upper-class Bangkok households that dominated television viewership during the period. Critics often regarded the music's rural vocal style, lyrical directness, and regional aesthetics as incompatible with dominant urban ideals of refinement and cosmopolitan taste. Yet the term persisted and was gradually embraced by performers, listeners, and migrant audiences whose experiences increasingly shaped the genre's popularity.

This early moment reveals how *luk thung* music occupied an ambivalent cultural position: while strongly associated with rural life and migration, its circulation and recognition were mediated through urban broadcast institutions. The genre therefore emerged not outside Bangkok's cultural sphere, but through ongoing interactions among migration, media circulation, rural memory, and urban listening practices.

3.2. Sonic Maps: Labor, Ambition, and Mobility

By the 1970s, *luk thung* lyrics increasingly reflected the experiences of migration and urban transition shaping modern Thailand. Songs described factory labor, urban loneliness, return journeys, and emotional attachment to rural homeplaces, allowing listeners to navigate changing social worlds through sound and narration (Jirattikorn). In this sense, *luk thung* music functioned as a form of sonic mapping through which mobility and displacement became culturally audible.

Sayan Sanya's "Nak Phleng Khon Chon" (นักเพลงคนจน, *The Poor Musician*), for example, presents the voice of a rural singer pursuing opportunity in the city despite limited formal education and uncertain social status. Through direct lyrical address and emotionally restrained vocal delivery, the song frames ambition, vulnerability, and mobility as interconnected experiences rather than purely economic conditions. The narrator's appeal for compassion transforms personal uncertainty into a recognizable social voice shared by many listeners navigating migration and urban transition.

Songs such as these demonstrate how *luk thung* music mediated experiences of movement, aspiration, distance, and belonging through voice, musical narration, and sonic familiarity. Rather than documenting migration solely as social change, the genre rendered its emotional and auditory dimensions audible within everyday listening practices.

3.3. Musical Hybridity, Media Circulation, and Revival

From its earliest decades, *luk thung* music developed not as a fixed traditional form, but as a hybrid musical style shaped by regional performance practices, media circulation, and global popular sounds. Mitchell notes that its melodic foundations drew heavily from Central Thai musical idioms while incorporating ornamentation associated with Isan *molam* (หมอลำอีสาน) and, in some cases, Southern performance traditions (Mitchell). Terry Miller's study of *molam* further demonstrates how Northeast vocal techniques and the timbre of *khaen* (แคน, mouth organ) contributed to the expressive qualities that later became closely associated with *luk thung* music (Miller). These regional influences interacted with foreign musical styles—including Latin dance rhythms, cinematic orchestration, and American popular music—which circulated widely through films, radio, and U.S. military presence during the Cold War period (Lockard; Mitchell).

Thanapat Tanprasert and Christopher Rockwell contrast this musical synthesis with *dontri sakon* (ดนตรีสากล, international music), which adopted Western pop and rock styles more directly as markers of cosmopolitan modernity (Tanprasert and Rockwell). By contrast, *luk thung* music retained stronger associations with regional vocalicity, rural memory, and migration-oriented listening publics, even while absorbing diverse musical influences. Rather than existing as isolated musical categories, *luk thung* and *dontri sakon* increasingly interacted through shared media environments, recording industries, and broadcast technologies.

By the 1980s, the spread of cassette technology significantly transformed patterns of musical circulation and listening. Portable and inexpensive cassette recordings enabled *luk thung* songs to move widely across provincial markets, transportation routes, and migrant communities in Bangkok. Amporn Jirattikorn notes that by the mid-1980s, the genre accounted for nearly 40 percent of Thailand's music sales (Jirattikorn). The same period also witnessed an expansion of visual and performative spectacle through televised concerts and large-scale stage performances featuring sequined costumes, *hang khruang* (หางเครื่อง, backup dancers), amplified sound systems, and elaborate staging. These

developments linked rural musical imagery with modern entertainment technologies, reshaping how *luk thung* music was heard, viewed, and performed.

The Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 marked another important moment in the genre's transformation. During this period, *luk thung* music was increasingly revalued within public discourse as a recognizable expression of Thai cultural identity (Jirattikorn). At the same time, the genre continued to absorb transnational musical influences, including salsa, rap, techno, and contemporary pop arrangements (Tanprasert and Rockwell). Television performers and mainstream popular musicians also began crossing more fluidly between *luk thung* and *dontri sakon* performance styles, softening earlier distinctions between the genres. By the early 2000s, *luk thung* music had become simultaneously associated with rural nostalgia, media modernity, and evolving forms of popular musical hybridity.

In this broader context of migration, media circulation, and musical transformation, *luk thung* songs emerged as important auditory sites through which mobility, memory, longing, and social transition were mediated. The following sections turn to close readings of selected songs, focusing on return migration, dialogic vocal exchange, and the sonic textures through which mobility became culturally audible within modern Thailand.

4. Bangkok as a Sonic Site

Bangkok occupies a central yet ambivalent position within the sonic imagination of *luk thung* songs. As Thailand's primary political, economic, and cultural center, the capital city emerged during the second half of the twentieth century as a major destination for rural migrants seeking employment, education, and social mobility. Within *luk thung* music, however, Bangkok is experienced not only as a geographic destination, but also as an auditory environment shaped through migration, media circulation, and changing listening practices. In contrast to *luk krung* (ลูกกรุง, songs of the capital city) and the Suntharaphon (สุนทราภรณ์) repertoires—which in songs such as “Krung Thep” (กรุงเทพ, *Bangkok*, 1963) and “Krung Thep Ratree” (กรุงเทพมหานคร, *Night Time Bangkok*, 1951) often portray the city through cosmopolitan romance and urban elegance—*luk thung* songs frequently approach Bangkok through migration, memory, and sonic distance.

Through both lyrical narration and musical texture, *luk thung* songs render urban experience audible. Songs such as “Sut Thai Thi Krung Thep”

(ชุดท้ายที่กรุงเทพ, *The End in Bangkok*, 1986) by Sunaree Ratchasima portray Bangkok as a space shaped by uncertainty, aspiration, and distance from rural homeplaces. Similarly, Phumphuang Duangchan's "Sao A.M." (สาวเอเอ็ม, *A.M. Girl*) employs radio technology as a sonic metaphor for contrasting listening worlds. Within the song, A.M. radio—familiar, provincial, and associated with rural listening practices—is contrasted with the fashionable F.M. soundscape linked to Bangkok youth culture. By identifying its heroine as a "girl of A.M.," the song frames rural auditory familiarity not as backwardness, but as a continuing mode of listening carried into urban modernity.

Rather than depicting migration as complete rupture, Sao A.M. suggests that attachment to rural life may persist through listening practices, vocal familiarity, and sonic memory even after physical relocation. *Luk thung* songs therefore sustain forms of continuity across geographic movement, allowing migrants to inhabit urban environments while remaining connected to regional soundscapes and remembered auditory experiences of home.

This urban soundscape is shaped not only through lyrics, but also through vocal timbre, instrumentation, and musical style. Nasal vocal delivery, regional accents, and the incorporation of Thai melodic idioms and folk instruments maintain audible associations with provincial and regional musical aesthetics. These characteristics differ from vocal standards historically associated with Thai classical and urban musical traditions developed within elite cultural circles in nineteenth-century Bangkok (Swangviboonpong). Even when recorded in Bangkok studios and circulated through urban media networks, *luk thung* music often preserves what may be described as a rural point of audition. Bangkok thus emerges not simply as a symbolic center of Thai modernity, but as a sonic environment mediated through radio broadcasting, vocality, musical texture, and migratory listening.

As a whole, these songs map different auditory orientations toward Bangkok as the capital city and a major site of urban modernity in Thailand. In *Sut Thai Thi Krung Thep*, the city is experienced through distance, uncertainty, and migratory separation, while in *Sao A.M.* urban modernity enters everyday rural experience through radio frequencies and mediated listening. In both cases, Bangkok functions less as a singular urban actor than as a broader auditory environment shaping experiences of mobility, aspiration, and social transformation within modern Thailand.

The following sections turn to close readings of selected songs, focusing more specifically on return migration, dialogic vocal exchange,

and the sonic textures through which mobility becomes culturally audible in *luk thung* music.

5. Calling Across Distance: Sound, Memory, and Longing

A recurring motif in *luk thung* songs is the male voice calling for a woman to return home from the city. These songs articulate not only romantic longing, but also the emotional distance and uncertainty produced by migration and urban transition. Through recurring acts of calling and lyrical repetition, the desire for return becomes a sonic expression of attachment to home, memory, and rural belonging. Rather than portraying migration solely as physical movement, the songs render migration audible through longing, waiting, and imagined hearing across distance.

In many of these narratives, Bangkok appears as a space associated with opportunity, mobility, and modern social life, particularly for young rural women entering new urban environments. The male narrators, meanwhile, remain closely tied to rural soundscapes, agricultural memory, and local attachment. Drawing on Ahmed's (2004) understanding of affect as circulation between bodies, places, and signs, these songs reveal how hope, uncertainty, desire, and nostalgia become attached to the figure of the migrating woman. Her movement toward the city transforms migration into an emotional and auditory condition experienced through separation, anticipation, and imagined return.

Suphanburi occupies a particularly significant place within this sonic landscape. Widely associated with influential *luk thung* singers such as Suraphon Sombatcharoen and Sayan Sanya, the province became an important auditory reference point within Central Thai rural musical culture. References to Suphanburi in these songs therefore function not simply as geographic markers, but as invocations of shared musical memory, regional vocality, and attachment to rural homeplaces. Calling someone back to Suphanburi is thus also a call toward familiarity, recognition, and remembered sound.

Following Judith Butler's concept of performativity, these songs may also be understood as performative enactments of longing and attachment. The male voice does not merely describe emotional loss; it actively performs waiting, remembrance, and emotional attachment through repeated acts of vocal address. *Luk thung* songs thereby become sonic spaces in which migration is mediated through voice, memory, and emotional projection rather than direct physical presence alone.

The following two songs—"Klap Thoet Riam Cha" (กลับเถิดเรียมจ๋า, *Please Come Back, My Dear Riam*) and "Siang Khlui Riak Nang" (เสียงขลุ่ยเรียกนาง, *Flute*

Melody Calling the Girl Back)—exemplify these sonic dynamics of return and attachment through distinct sonic forms of longing and attachment.

5.1. Voice, Return, and Rural Memory in “Klap Thoet Riam Cha”

“Klap Thoet Riam Cha” (กลับเถิดเรียนจำ, *Please Come Back, My Dear Riam*) was first recorded around 1959–1960 by Muengmon Sombatcharoen, an early member of Suraphon Sombatcharoen’s ensemble. Written by Suraphon, the song became one of the most widely recognized classics of early *luk thung* music, particularly through its emotionally direct vocal style and memorable lyrical address. Performed through a restrained yet persistent male voice, the song stages migration not as distant observation, but as an embodied journey of searching, calling, and attempted return.

The narrative centers on a woman named Riam who has migrated from Suphanburi to Bangkok. Unlike songs that depict longing from afar, the narrator himself travels from the countryside to the capital in search of her. The song therefore unfolds through movement across migratory space rather than remote remembrance alone. As he searches through the city, the repeated plea for Riam’s return transforms vocal address into an act of pursuit, sustaining attachment through calling, memory, and imagined listening amid urban distance and uncertainty. Below is the full lyric with translation:

Lyrics: “Klap Thoet Riam Cha”

(กลับเถิดเรียนจำ, *Please Come Back, My Dear Riam*) (1950s)

Thai Lyrics

เสียงนี้ที่ดัง เรียนอ้อยเอ้งฟัง จำได้หรือเปล่า

เสียงนี้เป็นเสียงบอกข่าว

ว่าข้ามมารับเจ้ากลับสุพรรณ

พ่อแม่เฝ้าตาย วัวควายไถนาเอ็งนั้น

ไม่มีใครเขาจัดการรับกลับสุพรรณเสียเถิดเรียน

ข้านี้ตามเอ็ง จนแทบทั่วกรุง นุ่งมาหมยมัน

English Translation

This voice calling — Riam, can you hear it?

Do you remember me? It brings news: I’ve come to take you back to Suphanburi.

Your parents have died — your fields and buffalo have no one to care for them. Hurry home to Suphanburi, Riam.

I have searched for you nearly everywhere in Bangkok, driven by hope. Almost a year

Thai Lyrics

เกือบปีแล้วที่มุกมัน ตามหาเอ็งนั้น
ผิวกร้านหม่นเกรียม

กลับเถิดสุพรรณ อย่ามัวนั่งฝันเลยเรียน
กลับไปเบจจอบเบกเสียน
พลิกพื้นผืนนาดีกว่าอยู่กรุง

สุพรรณบ้านเรา แม้จะเป็นท้องทุ่งนา
เรียนเอ๋ยยังดีเสียกว่า พอถึงเวลา มีข้าวใส่ยุ้ง

อย่าหลงอยู่เลย สวรรค์เมืองฟ้าเมืองกรุง
กลับคืนบ้านนาบ้านทุ่ง
มุ่งสู่สุพรรณเสียเถิดใจนางาม

แฉะนี้มีคน เป็นหญิงชื่อเรียน อยู่ข้างหรือเปล่า
หากพบคุณช่วยบอกข่าว
ว่าคนสุพรรณนั้นเขามาตาม

ให้กลับสุพรรณ บ้านเดิมเสียเถิดคนงาม
อย่าให้เขาคอยติดคาน อยู่เลยคนงาม
จังหวัดสุพรรณ

English Translation

struggling — my skin rough
and darkened from the
journey.

Return to Suphanburi — stop
chasing empty dreams. Come
back to the hoe and spade,
renewing the fields — better
than living in Bangkok.

Suphanburi is our home —
only rice fields perhaps, but
better still: when the time
comes, rice fills the granary.

Don't be carried away by the
glittering "heaven" of the city.
Return to the fields — come
home to Suphan, my beautiful
one.

Is there a woman here named
Riam? If you find her, please
tell her — the man from
Suphan has come for her.

Tell her to return to her first
home — fair lady. Don't make
him keep searching — oh
beautiful one of Suphanburi.

The song opens with an explicit act of vocal calling and imagined hearing: "This voice calling — Riam, can you hear it?" From its very first line, the song frames migration through auditory distance, transforming voice into a primary medium of emotional connection across separation. Through direct address, agricultural imagery, and repeated references to personal memory, migration becomes an experience shaped through calling, waiting, and the hope of return. The narrator's journey from Suphanburi to Bangkok conveys the persistence of attachment despite physical distance, while references to "roughened and darkened skin"

evoke the exhaustion associated with travel, searching, and emotional endurance. Rather than presenting return solely as social restoration, the song frames it as a desire to recover intimacy, familiarity, and shared rural life.

Images such as “rice fills the granary” (มีข้าวใส่ยุ้ง, *mi khao sai yung*) frame the countryside as a place of cyclical continuity, sufficiency, and shared rural livelihood. The line evokes an agricultural rhythm in which labor, seasonality, and sustenance remain socially and temporally ordered. By reminding Riam that “when the time comes, the granary will be full,” the narrator emphasizes the reliability of rural life and the enduring availability of home. Bangkok, by contrast, is represented as a space of uncertainty and social distance associated with migratory movement and changing relationships. The contrast between these spaces therefore emerges less through explicit political opposition than through differing temporalities, emotional expectations, and conditions of belonging articulated within the song.

The narrator’s repeated calling of Riam’s name gives the song much of its emotional force. His voice functions simultaneously as remembrance, appeal, and imagined communication across migratory distance, transforming lyrical repetition into an auditory enactment of longing. In this way, “Klap Thoet Riam Cha” presents migration not simply as geographic separation, but as an ongoing condition of listening, memory, and emotional projection.

The song’s enduring popularity suggests the broader resonance of these experiences during Thailand’s period of rapid migration and urban transformation. Rather than portraying the countryside and the city as fixed opposites, the song reveals how mobility reshaped emotional life through distance, listening, and the persistent desire for connection across changing social worlds.

5.2. Flute, Longing, and Migratory Distance in “Siang Khlui Riak Nang”

By the mid-twentieth century, *khlui*, together with rice fields and buffalo imagery associated with wet-rice farming and agrarian labor, had become strongly linked to rural life in Thai popular media. From songs such as *Khang Khuen Doen Ngai* (ข้างขึ้นเดือนหงาย, *On a Night of the Waxing Moon*, 1942) to films including *Santi-Vina* (1954), the flute frequently functioned as an auditory marker of rural sincerity, intimacy, and emotional vulnerability. “Siang Khlui Riak Nang” (เสียงขลุ่ยเรียกนาง, *Flute Melody Calling the Girl Back*) inherits and further develops this sonic language. Here, the

flute operates not simply as a musical instrument, but as a mediated voice carrying longing across migratory distance. Its sound extends the emotional reach of the singer beyond physical separation, transforming listening itself into a form of emotional attachment.

Released in the late 1960s and recorded by Sonkhiri Sriprachuap, “Siang Khlui Riak Nang” stages migration and separation through an evocative rural soundscape centered on *khloi*. The song opens with flute melodies carried through the evening breeze alongside the sounds of insects and nighttime rural ambience, establishing a rural auditory environment shaped by separation, memory, and anticipation. Rather than narrating migration solely through lyrical content, the song renders emotional separation audible through environmental sound, musical texture, and imagined listening. The flute becomes a mediated voice directed toward a woman who has migrated from the district of Doem Bang Nang Buat (mentioned as Doem Bang), Suphanburi to Bangkok, transforming sound itself into an act of calling across distance.

Lyrics: “Siang Khlui Riak Nang”

(เสียงขลุ่ยเรียกนาง, *Flute Melody Calling the Girl Back*) (1971)

Thai Lyrics

เสียงขลุ่ยครวญหวนมากับลม
ที่สะอื้นฝันระทม กลักรล้นฝันข่มใจเหงา

ขลุ่ยครวญครวญ พี่หวนคะนึ่งถึงเจ้า
ฟังเสียงหรีดหรีดเร้า ฟังเสียงเร้าไม่วาย

น้องจากนาหายหน้าจากจร
สู่กรุงเทพนานคร ตีครอนมีตอบจดหมาย

ได้ข่าวดีเจ้าคว้านเทพี่ชาวไร่
ลืมรักเก่าเราไว้ ลืมเอื้อโยลืมนง

โอ้เจ้ากลอยสวายน้อยบ้านนา

English Translation

The flute’s lament drifts upon the
wind;

I choke on sorrow and swallow the
loneliness I cannot suppress.

The flute moans, and I think only of
you;
the crickets’ cries intensify my
unending sadness.

You left the fields and disappeared
into Bangkok,
cutting me off — not replying to a
single letter.

I hear you’ve been crowned Farm
Queen
— leaving our old love behind,
forgetting every tie between us.

Oh beloved, little village girl

Thai Lyrics

จากดอกหญ้าไปเป็นคาราส่ง

ที่พลอยปลื้มถึงน้องจะลืมที่ลง
อย่าเรงหลง น้องอย่าใจจะวัง

หวิวไผ่ครางเคล้าลมอ่อนไออน
คันดาลเคี้ยวสุดคืนยืนต้น
คั่งคนสูญสิ้นความหวัง

ขลุ่ยบรรเลง เจ้ารับฟังเพลงที่บ่วง
กลอยเอยอย่าร้าง
หนุ่มเดิมบางสุพรรณหลงคอย

English Translation

— from a meadow grass flower
you've risen to become a high star.

I share in your pride, even if you've
forgotten me

— but do not be swept away,
remember who you are, be careful.

The bamboo sighs with the soft
wind; a lone palm strains to stand
upright — like a man who has lost
all hope.

My flute still plays — please listen
to my song; oh beloved, do not
abandon me — the man of Doem
Bang, Suphanburi is still waiting.

Within this sonic framework, the lyrics imagine the woman transformed through urban visibility and mobility—crowned Farm Queen (เทพีชาไร่, *thephi chao rai*) and elevated beyond the social horizons available in her rural hometown. The title itself suggests how rural identity, labor, and femininity become newly visible and culturally valued within urban modernity. The narrator expresses pride in her transformation (“from wildflower to high star”) while simultaneously recognizing the emotional distance created by migration and social mobility. His self-image as a lone palm tree bending against the wind renders separation audible through environmental and natural imagery, allowing loneliness and uncertainty to emerge through the surrounding rural soundscape.

Nostalgia in the song therefore emerges less as a desire to restore a fixed rural order than as an auditory condition shaped through memory, separation, and imagined hearing. The final plea—that she might still hear the flute and respond to its call—positions sound as a medium through which emotional attachment may persist despite migration and urban transformation. Bangkok thus appears not merely as a site of rupture, but as an urban center that draws rural people, labor, and aspiration into new social worlds while simultaneously reshaping emotional relationships across migratory distance.

5.3. Sonic Motifs of Return and Rural Memory

Taken together, the motifs shared across “Klap Thoet Riam Cha” and “Siang Khlui Riak Nang” construct a sonic landscape shaped by migration, memory, and rural attachment. Rice fields and granaries evoke not only agricultural life, but also rhythms of continuity, familiarity, and seasonal return associated with the countryside. Rather than functioning solely as economic symbols, these images situate longing within everyday rural environments shaped by labor, kinship, and repetition.

Natural soundscapes—including bamboo moving in the wind, crickets at dusk, and nighttime rural ambience—further intensify the songs’ atmosphere of distance and anticipation. These environmental sounds function not merely as background scenery, but as auditory textures through which migratory separation becomes emotionally perceptible. Within this soundscape, *khloi* becomes especially significant as a mediated voice of attachment. Its trembling tone carries emotional address across distance, transforming instrumental sound into an imagined form of communication between separated listeners. Table 1 summarizes the major sonic and symbolic motifs recurring across the two songs.

Table 1. Sonic and Emotional Motifs in Return-Migration *Luk Thung* Songs

Symbol / Motif	Meaning in Rural Life	Function in Song Narratives	Sonic / Emotional Function
Voice / Vocal Calling	Direct interpersonal communication and emotional expression	Calls across migratory distance	Mediates longing through imagined hearing and emotional address
<i>Khloi</i>	Rural musical instrument associated with agrarian life	Extends emotional communication across distance	Functions as a mediated voice of attachment

Symbol / Motif	Meaning in Rural Life	Function in Song Narratives	Sonic / Emotional Function
Rice fields	Agricultural continuity and seasonal rhythm	Signals attachment to rural life	Evokes memory, continuity, and place
Granary with rice	Familiarity and sustenance	Represents stability and rural continuity	Suggests security associated with home
Nature (bamboo wind, crickets, night air)	Environmental soundscape	Amplifies separation and anticipation	Creates emotional atmosphere surrounding migration
Darkened, rough skin	Physical traces of rural labor	Marks lived experience and endurance	Embodies migration's emotional weight
Suphanburi	Shared musical and regional identity	Functions as remembered homeplace	Acts as an auditory marker of belonging

Other motifs identified in Table 1 similarly connect migration to embodied and localized experience. References to roughened or darkened skin emphasize the physical traces of agricultural labor and emotional endurance within conditions of mobility and separation. Suphanburi's recurring presence likewise reinforces the songs' auditory geography. As one of the most important cultural centers associated with early Central Thai *luk thung* music and singers such as Suraphon Sombatcharoen, the province functions as more than a geographic location. Within these songs, Suphanburi becomes an auditory marker of familiarity, regional musical memory, and rural belonging. As these voices circulated through radio broadcasts, vinyl recordings, and outdoor performances, the sound of

Suphanburi became part of a broader migratory listening culture connecting rural memory with urban experience.

In this way, the songs construct migration less as a complete rupture between countryside and city than as an ongoing auditory relationship mediated through voice, environmental sound, musical texture, and remembered listening. Even amid urban transformation and geographic movement, rural attachment persists through sound.

6. Factory Labor, Intimacy, and Dual-Voiced Narratives

The rapid expansion of export-oriented manufacturing during the 1970s and 1980s significantly reshaped patterns of migration, labor, and everyday social life in Thailand. State-led industrial development, including the establishment of industrial estates from 1972 onward, concentrated textile and garment production in areas surrounding Bangkok (Sa-nguanpuag). Alongside the growth of tourism and other urban industries, these developments drew large numbers of young women from provincial regions—particularly northern Thailand and Isan—into urban-industrial environments in search of new economic opportunities (United Nations Thailand, 2019). As Mary Beth Mills observes, the increasing movement of Thai women into urban labor systems also transformed expectations surrounding mobility, modernity, and personal identity.

Luk thung songs responded to these changing environments by exploring how intimacy, attachment, and emotional communication were mediated through migration and industrial life. Rather than depicting factory labor solely as economic experience, many songs situated romance, longing, and uncertainty within dormitories, letters, photographs, and forms of mediated communication shaped by distance and mobility. In this context, the *phleng kae* musical repertoire became especially significant as a dialogic musical form through which emotional exchange could unfold across alternating male and female vocal perspectives.

The song “Chanthana Thi Rak” (ฉันทนาคีรัก, *My Beloved Chanthana*), recorded by Rakchat Sirichai in 1979, became one of the most recognizable musical representations of factory romance and migrant intimacy in late twentieth-century Thailand, to the extent that a given name “Chanthana” itself became a colloquial reference for female factory workers. Its paired reply song, “Chanthana Top Rak” (ฉันทนาคอบรัก, *Chanthana Replies to Love*), extends this narrative through a female vocal response shaped by hesitation, emotional distance, and mediated longing. Earlier discussions of the Chanthana duet have emphasized its relationship to gendered

migration, affective labor, and working-class emotional formation during Thailand's industrial transformation (Valyamedhi). Building on that foundation, the present analysis focuses more specifically on mediated intimacy, dialogic vocal exchange, and the sonic dimensions of *phleng kae* as forms of auditory negotiation across migratory distance. The following section examines how these dynamics unfold through the dialogic structure of the Chanthana duet. Rather than reproducing the full lyrics, the following discussion focuses on selected passages and vocal moments most relevant to mediated listening, dialogic exchange, and migratory intimacy within the *phleng kae* structure.

6.1. Dialogic Vocality and Mediated Intimacy in the Chanthana Duet

The *phleng kae* musical repertoire occupies a distinctive place within *luk thung* music by transforming solitary narration into dialogic musical exchange. One of the most influential examples is the pairing of "Chanthana Thi Rak" and "Chanthana Top Rak," which emerged during Thailand's rapid urban-industrial transformation in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The dialogic structure of the duet is particularly significant. The male voice initiates communication through letters, photographs, and recorded song, while the female reply transforms listening itself into a form of mediated vocal response shaped by hesitation and uncertainty. The *phleng kae* form allows intimacy to unfold through alternating vocal perspectives shaped by sound, memory, and imagined reception. Earlier discussions of the Chanthana duet have examined its relationship to gendered migration and emotional experiences associated with Thailand's industrial transformation. Building on that foundation, the present analysis focuses more specifically on dialogic vocality, mediated listening, and auditory correspondence across migratory distance.

Recorded by Rakchat Sirichai in 1979, "Chanthana Thi Rak" became one of the best-known musical portrayals of factory romance in late twentieth-century Thailand. The song stages longing through letters, photographs, and imagined listening, transforming private affection into a relationship sustained through circulation rather than co-presence.

The song opens within a quiet nighttime domestic setting: "Turning off the light, latching the door — about to sleep, I think of your face." This restrained atmosphere immediately establishes solitude and migratory separation, while the act of writing a letter before the beloved's factory shift situates intimacy within the rhythms of industrial time. The textile factory appears not simply as a workplace, but as an environment

reorganizing intimacy, communication, and everyday social relations through schedules, separation, and delayed correspondence.

Throughout the song, communication remains uncertain and indirect. The narrator repeatedly apologizes for his handwriting and limited education, describing himself as “a man of the wild countryside” (คนบ้านป่า, *khon ban pa*). In the present discussion, these expressions are approached more specifically as forms of hesitant emotional address shaped by distance and imagined reception. The fragmented self-presentation and repeated apologies create a hesitant vocal presence shaped through distance, uncertainty, and imagined reception rather than direct interpersonal encounter.

Particularly significant is the exchange of photographs. The narrator sends a signed photograph as a New Year’s gift while anxiously anticipating rejection: “If you despise it ... tear it and burn it.” The photograph functions not merely as a romantic token, but as a material extension of presence capable of sustaining attachment despite physical separation. His request for a photograph in return transforms the relationship into a fragile visual and auditory correspondence shaped by anticipation, uncertainty, and imagined reciprocity.

The song’s devotional language further intensifies this atmosphere of mediated longing. When the narrator promises to “treasure it like a sacred charm” (เอาไปบูชา, *ao wai bucha*), emotional attachment becomes intertwined with preservation, memory, and symbolic presence. Sound, photography, and lyrical repetition together sustain intimacy through circulation, anticipating the reciprocal vocal response later developed in “Chanthana Top Rak”.

The reciprocal exchange initiated in “Chanthana Thi Rak” is expanded several years later in “Chanthana Top Rak”, popularized by Phumphuang Duangchan in 1985. The reply song introduces a female vocal response shaped through hesitation, distance, and listening. As a *phleng kae* reply, the song transforms solitary longing into reciprocal vocal exchange, allowing emotional uncertainty to unfold through alternating perspectives rather than direct resolution.

Emotional exchange in the reply song unfolds within the auditory environment of the factory dormitory. The opening lines situate the singer in a space of waiting and listening: “In the dorm I wait, my heart drifting ... a love song softly echoes.” Rather than beginning with direct confession, the song first establishes listening itself as the condition through which intimacy becomes possible. The female narrator hears the earlier love song

from afar, transforming recorded sound into a mediated presence circulating through urban-industrial life.

Communication in the reply song likewise remains hesitant and incomplete. Chanthana repeatedly rereads the letter sent to her but remains uncertain about replying. In the present discussion, the focus falls more specifically on how hesitation, repetition, and delayed response shape the song's auditory structure of correspondence. Intimacy emerges through circulation: letters, photographs, remembered voices, and recorded songs become substitutes for direct presence.

The exchange of photographs continues to function as a fragile form of reciprocal attachment. Chanthana describes holding the signed photograph "dearly in my heart," while simultaneously fearing that her own image may become "bothersome clutter" to the beloved. These objects therefore sustain emotional connection through uncertainty and anticipation rather than stable romantic fulfillment.

Phumphuang Duangchan's vocal performance further intensifies this atmosphere of caution and distance. Her restrained delivery, softened melodic contours, and slight pauses in phrasing produce an auditory impression of hesitation rather than refusal. The emotional force of the song thus emerges not only through lyrical meaning, but through vocal timing, timbre, and the sensation of listening to a response formed gradually through uncertainty and separation.

Together, the Chanthana duet transforms migration into a dialogic sonic exchange sustained through letters, photographs, recorded voice, and imagined listening. Through the *phleng kae* structure, intimacy emerges through circulation, delayed response, and alternating vocal perspectives rather than physical reunion. In this way, *luk thung* music functions as a form of auditory correspondence through which mobility, longing, and emotional attachment become culturally audible within modern Thailand.

6.2. Dialogic Vocality, Gendered Listening, and the Sonic Archive

The Chanthana duet reveals how *phleng kae* structures emotional exchange through alternating male and female vocal perspectives. While both narrators participate in the same migratory and urban-industrial environment, the songs articulate differing modes of longing, hesitation, and emotional address through contrasting vocal positions. Rather than presenting fixed gender oppositions, the duet constructs intimacy through

dialogic exchange, delayed response, and imagined listening across distance.

The symbolic role of photographs and letters is central to this emotional correspondence. The pocket-sized portraits exchanged by the couple reflect a recognizable romantic practice shaped by migration, factory schedules, dormitory life, and prolonged separation. Letters and photographs become material substitutes for physical proximity, allowing attachment to circulate through anticipation, memory, and repeated acts of listening and rereading. Emotional intimacy therefore emerges not through direct co-presence, but through mediated forms of exchange sustained across migratory distance.

Although both singers participate in the same emotional relationship, the duet organizes longing through contrasting vocal orientations. The male voice repeatedly initiates communication through calling, apology, and devotional self-presentation, while the female voice responds through hesitation, delayed reply, and emotional restraint shaped by listening. These contrasting modes of address structure the dialogic movement of the duet itself.

Table 2. Contrasting Modes of Vocal Address in the Chanthana Duet

Male Vocal Perspective	Female Vocal Perspective
Fear of emotional distance and separation	Hesitation toward emotional reciprocity
Devotional vocal address through letters and photographs	Cautious emotional response through delayed communication
Longing expressed through repeated calling and self-effacing language	Emotional restraint articulated through listening and uncertainty
Rural attachment voiced through memory and anticipation	Urban emotional negotiation shaped through dormitory listening and mediated exchange

These contrasting vocal positions do not produce absolute oppositions between countryside and city, masculinity and femininity, or tradition and modernity. Instead, the songs sustain intimacy through alternating acts of emotional response shaped by migratory separation and industrial time. Their relationship survives not in shared physical space, but through circulation, delayed communication, and imagined listening across distance.

The sonic structure of *phleng kae* musical repertoire is equally vital to this process of auditory exchange. Beyond lyrical dialogue, vocal delivery and melodic phrasing shape how intimacy, hesitation, and emotional distance are experienced through sound. Unlike the earlier male-voiced song “Siang Khlui Riak Nang,” which employed the bamboo flute as a sonic marker of rural longing, the Chanthana duet situates the migrant subject within the auditory environment of urban-industrial life. The alternating voices of the duet create an auditory structure in which waiting, listening, and delayed response become central emotional conditions of migration.

In this way, the Chanthana songs expand *luk thung* music beyond solitary lament into dialogic sonic correspondence. Emotional attachment is sustained not through physical reunion, but through circulation, repetition, and reciprocal acts of vocal listening. The *phleng kae* form therefore allows migration, intimacy, and emotional uncertainty to become culturally audible through sound itself.

7. Voice, Sound, and the Sonic Archive

The preceding analyses demonstrate that *luk thung* songs preserve migratory experience not only through lyrical narration, but also through vocal texture, listening practices, and auditory memory. Across songs of migratory longing and factory romance, emotional attachment is sustained through repeated acts of hearing, delayed correspondence, and familiar sonic presence. In this way, *luk thung* music functions as a “sonic archive” (Ochoa Gautier), preserving experiences of mobility, longing, and social transformation through auditory circulation and listening.

Vocal delivery in *luk thung* music therefore carries emotional and cultural meaning beyond lyrical content alone. Regional pronunciation, nasal timbre, and restrained melodic phrasing preserve audible traces of locality and familiarity even within urban-industrial settings. Unlike highly standardized urban vocal aesthetics associated with elite and cosmopolitan musical traditions in Bangkok (Swangviboonpong), *luk thung* singers frequently retain distinctive vocal textures associated with provincial listening cultures. Sound thus becomes a medium through

which migratory experience remains emotionally legible across displacement, allowing listeners to sustain continuity with remembered places, relationships, and forms of belonging. These qualities become especially significant when attached to singers whose voices themselves become culturally familiar across migratory listening networks.

The importance of voice and vocal presence is already central to earlier songs such as “Klap Thoet Riam Cha,” in which emotional attachment is sustained through direct vocal calling across migratory distance. In the Chanthana duet, however, vocality becomes even more closely tied to the cultural authority of the singer herself through the performance of Phumphuang Duangchan (1961–1992), widely celebrated as the “Queen of Luk Thung” (ราชินีลูกทุ่ง). Her highly identifiable vocal style—shaped through regional accent, emotional restraint, and oral musicianship—foregrounded voice as a source of artistic identity and emotional communication. Phumphuang was illiterate and became especially known for performing through memorization rather than written notation, relying on listening and vocal memory during recording sessions (Phumsap). Her rise to national prominence therefore demonstrates how vocal skill, auditory memory, and identifiable vocal presence could become forms of cultural authority without dependence upon textual literacy. The Chanthana duet therefore reinforces the role of voice in making migration, emotional attachment, and social recognition culturally audible within *luk thung* music.

Earlier male-voiced songs such as “Siang Khlui Riak Nang” similarly construct migratory memory through instrumental sound. Although *khlui* historically formed part of Thai court ensembles such as *mahori* and *khruang sai*, twentieth-century popular media increasingly repositioned the instrument within representations of rural and peasant life. In songs, films, and popular visual culture, *khlui* frequently appeared as the solitary instrument played by rural men, gradually becoming an auditory marker of agrarian masculinity, sincerity, and countryside life. Within “Siang Khlui Riak Nang,” *khlui* therefore functions as a mediated voice carrying longing and rural attachment across migratory distance. In contrast, the Chanthana duet shifts this sonic archive toward vocal correspondence itself, transforming letters, recorded songs, and reciprocal listening into forms of emotional continuity sustained through circulation and delayed response.

Through these differing sonic strategies, *luk thung* music preserves the emotional textures of migration within modern Thailand. Rather than depending solely on narrative representation, the genre embeds memory,

attachment, and social experience directly into vocal timbre, instrumental sound, and practices of listening. The sonic archive of *luk thung* therefore emerges not as a static record of rural nostalgia, but as an ongoing auditory process through which migrants sustain continuity with their relationships, memories, and histories through shared practices of listening and vocal remembrance.

8. Conclusion

Luk thung music has long mediated the emotional realities of migration within modern Thailand. As industrial expansion and urbanization reshaped patterns of labor, mobility, and everyday life during the second half of the twentieth century, the genre emerged as an important auditory medium through which migrants negotiated distance, attachment, uncertainty, and continuity. The preceding analyses demonstrate that *luk thung* songs preserve experiences of mobility not only through lyrical narration, but also through voice, listening practices, and emotional correspondence. Migration in this context becomes culturally audible through recorded voice, sonic memory, and the circulation of songs across geographic separation.

The earlier male-voiced songs examined in this study transform rural sound into an auditory structure of memory and longing. In “Siang Khloi Riak Nang” and “Klap Thoet Riam Cha,” *khloi*, nighttime rural soundscapes, and agricultural imagery create emotional associations between sound, locality, and rural attachment. These songs frame migratory separation not only as physical distance, but as a condition heard through calling, waiting, and remembered voice. The countryside therefore persists not simply as a geographic location, but as an auditory environment sustained through musical repetition, vocal address, and listening.

The Chanthana duet further expands this sonic world by transforming intimacy into dialogic correspondence structured through the *phleng kae* musical repertoire. Rather than presenting romance through direct encounter, “Chanthana Thi Rak” and “Chanthana Top Rak” construct emotional exchange through letters, photographs, delayed response, and imagined hearing across urban-industrial distance. The alternating male and female voices create a reciprocal auditory structure in which longing unfolds through circulation and response rather than physical reunion. In this way, the duet demonstrates how migration reshapes intimacy through mediated forms of communication and auditory exchange.

The importance of voice becomes especially visible in the performance of Phumphuang Duangchan (1961–1992), whose

interpretation of “Chanthana Top Rak” foregrounds the relationship between oral musicianship, vocal memory, and auditory transmission. Her highly identifiable vocal delivery, shaped through regional accent, nasal timbre, and memorized performance practice, illustrates how emotional authority in *luk thung* music emerges through embodied listening and recognizable vocal presence. Phumphuang was illiterate and became widely known for relying on memorization rather than written notation during recording sessions. Her performance practice therefore further reinforces the role of oral transmission and vocal memory within the genre’s listening culture. Through such performances, vocal texture itself becomes a medium through which experiences of mobility remain emotionally recognizable.

Taken together, these songs demonstrate how *luk thung* music functions as a “sonic archive” (Ochoa Gautier) that preserves the emotional textures of migration through vocal and musical forms. This archive is not a static repository of rural nostalgia, but an ongoing auditory process through which mobility, memory, and social transformation continue to circulate across changing historical conditions. Vocal timbre, regional pronunciation, instrumental sound, and dialogic song structures allow migrants to remain culturally audible to themselves and others even amid displacement and urban transformation.

This study therefore contributes to scholarship on Thai popular music by foregrounding voice, instrumental sound, and sonic correspondence as central dimensions of migratory experience. It demonstrates how migration in modern Thailand became culturally mediated not only through mobility and labor, but also through recognizable vocal forms, instrumental symbolism, and practices of auditory remembrance. Future research may further explore how radio broadcasting, cassette circulation, and evolving vocal aesthetics shaped migratory listening cultures across different generations of *luk thung* performers and audiences. Such approaches may also contribute more broadly to the study of sound, mobility, and popular music within Southeast Asian modernity.

Beyond its contribution to Thai popular music studies, this article also contributes to language and linguistic-cultural research by foregrounding voice, dialogic exchange, and auditory mediation as central dimensions of migratory experience. The analyses demonstrate how emotional meaning is communicated not only through lyrical content, but also through regional pronunciation, vocal timing, oral performance practices, and forms of mediated correspondence structured through *phleng kae* songs. In this sense, *luk thung* music operates as a linguistic-cultural practice in

which communication, memory, and social attachment are sustained through voice, repetition, and sonic recognition across migratory distance. The study therefore highlights how language, sound, and musical performance intersect within broader processes of mobility and modernity in Thailand.

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Address for correspondence

Chawarote Valyamedhi
Department of Southeast Asian Languages and Cultures
National Chengchi University
No. 64, Section 2, Zhinan Road,
Wenshan District,
Taipei City 116011, Taiwan

c.valy@nccu.edu.tw

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