

**Socio-Cultural Reflections of Isan Society in Molam Klon Performances toward Modern Society****Atsadawoot Srithon<sup>1</sup>**

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This study aims to examine the socio-cultural reflections of Isan society as represented in *Mor Lam* narrative verse performances (*Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon*), with particular attention to the dynamic transition toward modern society. This qualitative research employs a textual analysis approach, drawing on data collected from five leading *Mor Lam* troupes in Northeastern Thailand: Rattanasin Intathai Rat, Prathom Bantingsin, Rabiab Watasin, Sinlapin Phu Thai, and Saonoi Phet Banphaeng. The analysis focuses on linguistic representations within the most popular narrative verse performances—ranked first and second—from each troupe, totaling ten performances. The study encompasses the analysis of verse texts, dialogues, modes of communication, and performer–audience interactions.

The findings reveal that *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances function as a social space reflecting the dynamic transformations of Isan society and culture amidst the multifaceted transition toward modernity. These transformations can be understood through two primary dimensions. The first is the dimension of modern social life, which illustrates adaptation to capitalist economic systems and consumer culture, patterns of labor migration, and the shift from informal occupations to industrial labor systems. It also reflects the increasing complexity of social structures and educational systems, the growing acceptance of gender diversity, and the influence of technology and social media, as well as heightened awareness of contemporary legal and political issues.

The second dimension concerns modern cultural transformation, highlighting the adaptability and fluidity of local identities in relation to beliefs, traditions, ways of life, arts, and literature within new contexts. This includes changes in housing patterns, food culture, and dress, as well as the integration of foreign languages into everyday life. Together, these two dimensions demonstrate that *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* serves as a cultural archive that concretely represents and communicates the emergence of modern society.

**Keywords:** *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon*, Isan socio-culture, cultural reflection, modernity.

**1. Introduction**

Arts, culture, and the roots of local performing arts constitute a valuable cultural heritage that reflects the wisdom, ways of life, and identities of communities. These traditions have been transmitted across generations, serving not only as forms of entertainment but also as mechanisms for conveying knowledge, values, and customs (Boonyaraksa, 2016). In Northeastern Thailand, or Isan, a prominent form of folk performance regarded as the spiritual essence and lifeblood of the region is *Mor Lam*. This performance tradition emerged from the lived experiences of local communities, expressing stories, folktales, legends, and environmental contexts through poetic forms such as *phaya* and *klon lam*. The vocal delivery, characterized by distinctive tonal patterns and linguistic rhythms accompanied by traditional music, has long functioned to soothe the mind, impart Buddhist teachings, and reinforce social order. As such, *Mor Lam* is deeply intertwined with the life cycle of Isan people—from birth to death—and serves as a key indicator reflecting the broader dimensions of traditional Isan socio-cultural life (Phalangwan, 2002).

*Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* represents a highly valued form of folk performance in the Isan region, which evolved from traditional *Mor Lam Phuen* and *Mor Lam Klon* following the period after World War II. Influenced by *Likay* and stage drama, it developed into a live theatrical performance characterized by clearly defined character roles (Laochankham, 2021). The performances feature elaborate costumes, large-scale stage settings, and full musical ensembles. Narratives are conveyed through folktales, Jataka stories, or novels, articulated through elegantly composed and continuously linked poetic verses. Beyond its aesthetic value, *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* functions as a communal focal point that fosters social cohesion, while also demonstrating a capacity for creative adaptation in response to changing socio-cultural contexts. It plays a significant role in driving the local economy and sustaining the cultural identity of Isan people, ensuring its continued vitality in contemporary society.

Amid globalization and national development, Isan society has undergone a transition toward modernity, necessitating the adaptation of *Mor Lam* as a cultural form. It has increasingly transformed into a form of popular culture and has been elevated within the framework of the creative economy, becoming interconnected with various industries such as sound engineering, lighting systems, stage production, online media, and commercial advertising. Under policies promoted by the Creative Economy Agency, which emphasize the concept of “Applied Isan,” *Mor Lam* has been positioned as a form of cultural capital capable of generating economic value for the region (Saenpradit, 2009). This transformation requires *Mor Lam* troupes to negotiate a balance between preserving traditional values and responding to the tastes of contemporary audiences, resulting in hybrid forms that integrate traditional aesthetics with modern technologies and Western influences. One of the most evident manifestations of modernity within *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon*, or ensemble *Mor Lam*, is the dynamic transformation of language use and narrative content. Traditionally, *klon lam* focused on storytelling or moral instruction; however, in contemporary contexts, it has evolved into a social space that documents and reflects present-day life in a direct and explicit manner. This includes the incorporation of foreign vocabulary and digital-era terminology into both dialogue and poetic verses, as well as the commissioning of *klon lam* compositions for commercial advertising by private enterprises. Such linguistic hybridity and thematic adaptation (Srivilai Bongsithiphon, 2000) demonstrate the cultural flexibility of *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* in engaging diverse audiences, including Isan diasporic communities, younger generations, and online publics. Consequently, this performance form extends beyond mere entertainment; it functions as a living cultural document that records the transformations of Isan society in the era of globalization, encompassing shifts in economic structures, labor migration, consumer values, and gender diversity.

Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate the socio-cultural reflections of Isan society as it transitions toward modernity, as represented through *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances. The objective is to develop a deeper understanding of how socio-cultural realities are communicated and constructed through performance, as well as how Isan identities are negotiated within the context of contemporary social change. The findings of this study are expected not only to elucidate ongoing sociological and anthropological phenomena but also to serve as an essential knowledge base for the preservation, development, and sustainable continuation of local performing arts within modern Thai society.

**2. Objectives:**

2.1 To analyze the socio-cultural reflections of Isan society in *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances in the transition toward modernity.

**3. Methodology:** The researcher recognizes the significant value of cultural capital embedded in the entertainment-oriented performing arts of the Isan people, which exist in diverse forms. Among these, *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon*, also known as ensemble *Mor Lam*, stands out as one of the most popular and widely recognized forms. It is a cultural performance deeply rooted in recreational practices and is highly prevalent across the Northeastern region of Thailand. As such, *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* exerts considerable influence on the thoughts and behaviors of local communities. Therefore, this study employs cultural data derived from *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances to analyze socio-cultural reflections of Isan society in its transition toward modernity.

The study focuses on five selected *Mor Lam* troupes, chosen based on the following criteria:

1. Troupes that have been established for more than 20 years (as of 2024).
2. Troupes that demonstrate intergenerational transmission through family-based management and troupe systems.
3. Troupes with more than 150 performance engagements per year.
4. Large-scale troupes with at least 250 members.

A total of five troupes meeting these criteria were selected. These troupes represent leading groups in driving the contemporary *Mor Lam* industry, characterized by structured business-oriented management and extensive influence across social media platforms. They serve as key representatives reflecting the dynamic transformation of Isan society toward modernity.

**Table 1** presents the selected *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* troupes used in the analysis, arranged by year of establishment:

No.	Troupe	Location (Subdistrict/District/Provin
1	Rattanasin Intathai Rat	Ban Pet Subdistrict, Mueang District, Khon Kaen
2	Prathom Bantingsin	Phra Lap Subdistrict, Mueang District, Khon Kaen
3	Rabiab Watasin	Sawathi Subdistrict, Mueang District, Khon Kaen
4	Sinlapin Phu Thai	Thung Khlong Subdistrict, Kham Muang District, Kalasin
5	Saonoi Phet Banphaeng	Phaeng Subdistrict, Kosum Phisai District, Maha Sarakham

To ensure that the research captures the contemporary dynamics of *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon*, the researcher selected data from the period following the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic, when performances resumed at full scale. This period represents a critical turning point, during which *Mor Lam* troupes adapted to new conditions, including engagement with online platforms, the creation of closed groups for revenue generation, dissemination of performance media via social networks, the integration of technology into performances, and changes in performance formats, content, and language use. The data were collected from online performance content available on YouTube, a platform widely used for disseminating *Mor Lam* performances. The scope of the data covers the period from 2019 to 2024 and includes performances from the five selected troupes. The selection criteria for *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances are as follows:

1. Troupes that incorporate technology into performance production and promotion.
2. Troupes that obtain copyright permissions for music used in performances.
3. Troupes that actively engage with various online platforms.
4. Selection based on view counts of performances on each troupe's YouTube channel.
5. Selection of the two most-viewed performances from each troupe.

Table 2 presents the selected performances used in the analysis, arranged by troupe establishment period and highest view counts (two performances per troupe, as of 2024):

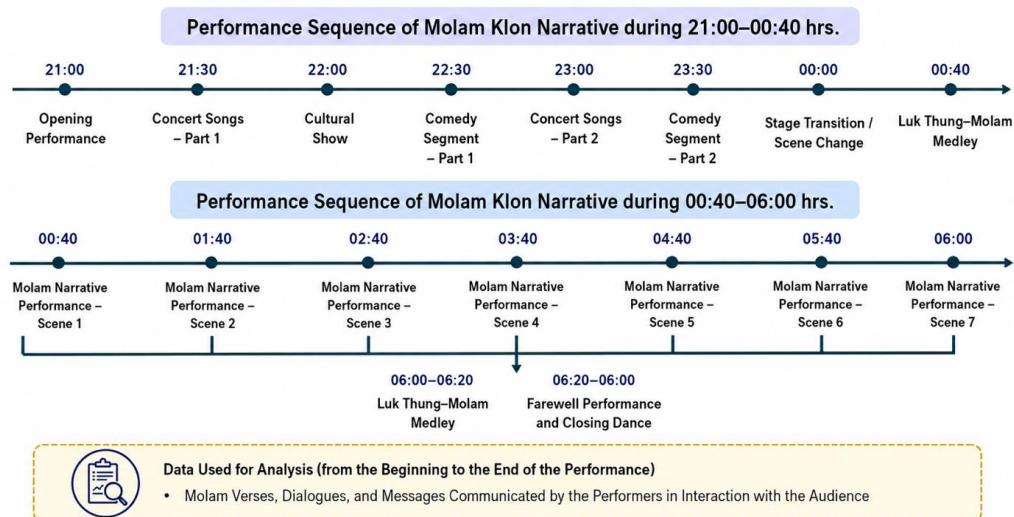
### List of Mor Lam Performance Videos on YouTube

No.	YouTube Channel	Mor Lam Story (Lam Luang to Klon)	Season (Year)	Views
1	Ban Mor Lam Rattanasin Official	Leh Rai Phai Rak	2562-2563	60 thousand views
2	Ban Mor Lam Rattanasin Official	Likit Rak Chua Nirun	2566-2567	46 thousand views
3	Mor Lam Prathom Bunterngsin	Kalong See Kon Bor Dee Long Amnat	2566-2567	12.3 thousand views
4	Mor Lam Prathom Bunterngsin	Kakee	2566-2567	11 thousand views
5	Rabeab Watahasin Live Channel	Ngoen Tem Pha Bor Tao Mee Panya Tem Phung	2566-2567	510 thousand views
6	Rabeab Watahasin Live Channel	Bap Dai Kae Phu Tham Kam Dai Kae Phu Sang	2567-2568	120 thousand views
7	Silapin Phu Thai Official	Sang Thong Ngao Pa	2564-2565	48 thousand views
8	Silapin Phu Thai Official	Pha Daeng Nang Ai	2566-2567	29 thousand views
9	Saonoi Phet Baanphaeng	Ha Mia Hai Phua	2563-2564	560 thousand views
10	Saonoi Phet Baanphaeng	Khun Chang Khun Phaen	2562-2563	330 thousand views

#### Sequence of Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon Performance

In this study, the analysis is confined to the *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* segment of the performance, focusing specifically on the poetic texts (*klon lam*), character dialogues, and the communicative interactions between performers and the audience. The analysis excludes the *toei* segments (musical and dance interludes) used for scene transitions or stage entrances and exits.

The scope of analysis covers the performance period from approximately midnight until dawn, that is, from the opening scene to the final scene of the *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performance. The researcher primarily relies on documented performance sequences as the basis for analysis. The detailed sequence of the *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performance is illustrated in the figure below.



Source: Researcher, 2024

#### 4. Results

An analysis of the language used in *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances reveals phenomena that have become clear reflections of modern Isan socio-cultural life through the linguistic text itself. In line with Touraine (1971), these performances demonstrate a fusion of traditional roots and the dynamics of the modern world. The content of *Rueang Tor Klon* performances reflects modern social and cultural realities across multiple dimensions, encompassing economic issues, the transition to industrial sectors, consumer culture, migrant labor, social structure, education, gender diversity, awareness of technology, social media, and political and governance-related concerns, as discussed by Smelser (1966). At the same time, these performances continue to narrate cultural dimensions—beliefs, ways of life, food, and dress—that have been adapted yet remain persistent amid globalization in complex and layered ways, as noted by Moore (1968).

**Reflections of Modern Social Life:** The analysis of reflections of modern social life draws upon tools from the social sciences and humanities, particularly content analysis and discourse analysis, in order to decode and interpret implicit meanings. This analytical approach enables the findings to be systematically categorized into several dimensions of reflection (Phanthumetha, 2016). These begin with reflections of economic life, which reveal inequality and struggle; reflections of the transition from independent occupations to industrial labor, which have altered modes of production and labor relations; and reflections of consumerist life, in which material objects increasingly shape value and identity. At the same time, the performances reveal reflections of migrant labor, which has become a crucial component of both the economy and urban society (Angkanichkit, 2019). Structurally, the analysis also points to reflections of social structure and change, including family, class, and power relations, alongside reflections of gender diversity, which have gained broader recognition and greater visibility in public discourse (Sattayanurak, 2015).

**1) Reflections of Economic Conditions:** One of the most prominent reflections in contemporary *Mor Lam* is the major transformation of economic structures—from an agrarian way of life dependent upon nature, both in reality and in the substance of *klon lam*, toward full incorporation into capitalist systems and consumer culture. *Mor Lam* performances have become living social documents that record both the hopes and the wounds of grassroots people confronting the new economic order (Kanchanaphan, 2008). Social demands are communicated through *klon lam*, shifting from depictions of the beauty of rural landscapes to narratives of modern social life, debt cycles, both agricultural and consumer debt driven by popular trends. These contents convey the stress and pressures experienced by laborers bound by monthly income and expenses, as well as the aspiration to possess material goods that elevate social status. Terms such as *digital money*, *finance*, *slip*, *bill*, *stress*, *traffic jam*, and *BAAC debt* appear in the performances, presenting the economic condition of a society facing structural difficulties. Through such language, *Mor Lam* artists become cultural agents who communicate and reflect the social dimensions of Isan life.

**2) Reflections of the Transition from Independent Occupations to Industry:** The performances also reflect the transformation of *Mor Lam* itself from an independent artistic occupation into an industry organized according to corporate structures. The organization and management of *Mor Lam* troupes have been restructured from earlier forms in pursuit of greater order and equity (Ondam, 2007). What was once a folk art relying primarily on individual skill has increasingly become an entertainment industry managed like a modern business organization, with branding, production standards, and systematic succession planning for executive roles. Terms such as *first round*, *boss*, *salary slip*, and *teamwork* exemplify this shift. The content of *klon lam* and dialogues often weaves real-life issues into the performance, particularly through comic roles that sharply satirize contemporary economic conditions, including falling agricultural prices, rising living costs, compulsive online shopping, and live-stream selling. These elements offer incisive critiques of superficial consumer culture while generating humor grounded in the shared experiences of the audience. Communication and interaction between performers and audiences further become one of the clearest simulations of a consumerist economy. The space in front of the stage is transformed into a site of status competition, where the public awarding of cash or expensive garlands, together with the announcement of names and amounts, becomes a signifier of financial capability and reinforces the notion that artistic value and social recognition are measured through tangible economic value.

**3) Reflections of Migrant Labor:** Reflections of migration and shifting social structures constitute another major dimension. Economic transformation has led to the significant phenomenon of migration, and *Mor Lam* has served as a powerful medium for recording and reflecting the lives of migrant workers, both domestic and overseas. *Klon lam* has become the voice of displaced people, articulating the hardships of living abroad and incorporating location-specific vocabulary such as *Kuwait*, *Middle East*, *Italy*, *Korea*, and *undocumented worker*, as well as feelings of homesickness and the hope of sending remittances back to support family members. These narratives point to poverty as a root cause of structural problems that compel separation and displacement. Migration also directly affects social structure (Chantavanich, 2008), and the *Mor Lam* stage reflects a transition from communalism to individualism, in which life security no longer depends solely on kinship networks but increasingly relies on formal systems such as insurance and modern financial knowledge. At the same time, the performances continue to reinforce and reproduce patronage systems deeply rooted in Thai society through interactions between artists and front-stage patrons, thereby reflecting mutual dependence between those with economic power and those who produce cultural work.

**4) Reflections of Consumerism:** *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances have become a sharp and vibrant space for reflecting consumer culture in modern society. This phenomenon is presented comprehensively, beginning with *klon lam*, whose content has expanded from depictions of everyday life to narratives of material desire and the struggle to acquire goods that signify social status, such as the latest smartphones, cars, or branded clothing. The lyrics reflect both dreams and the pleasures of ownership, through words such as *show*, *sale*, *order*, *promotion*, *series*, *story*, *concert*, and *party*, while also revealing the burden of debt and the pressure to maintain social appearance. Stage dialogue, especially satirical comedy, frequently mocks contemporary consumption practices, including addiction to online shopping, live-stream selling, and the construction of exaggeratedly luxurious images on social media. Most significantly, performer–audience interaction becomes the clearest simulation of a consumer economy. The practice of placing high-value garlands on performers to demonstrate financial means transforms the space before the stage into a site of status competition, where the value of artists and social acceptance are measured in economic terms (Jiwachaisak, 2007). Thus, these elements work together to present a complete reflection of a society driven by consumer culture. *Mor Lam* not only mirrors this culture but also participates in reproducing and negotiating its values.

**5) Reflections of Social Structure and Education:** Contemporary *Mor Lam* performances also sharply reflect the dynamics of social structure and education by portraying the heavy burden placed upon younger generations, who are expected by their families to use education as a means of upward social mobility—to erase inferiority and the pain of being constrained by poverty—rather than merely to pursue knowledge for its own sake (Chaiporn, 2016). This phenomenon corresponds with changes within the *Mor Lam* field itself, where many contemporary performers are formally educated, professionally trained, and university graduates, challenging the old stereotype that folk artists are educationally disadvantaged. Terms such as *minor wife*, *legal wife*, *insurance*, *call center gang*, *doctor*, *AI-style learning*, *5G era*, and *online learning* appear in the performances. In addition, the *Mor Lam* stage becomes a space for negotiating power through performance content and comic routines that satirize people occupying high-status social roles, such as teachers, doctors, lawyers, or local administrative officers. Presenting these figures in humorous and accessible ways not only entertains but also narrows class divisions and subtly critiques structures of power in Thai society.

**6) Reflections of Gender Diversity:** Reflections of contemporary identities and gender diversity in the digital age are also prominent. In the modern era, *Mor Lam* has become an important space for reflecting and broadening awareness of gender diversity. Whereas in the past individuals of diverse genders may have been portrayed in limited or stereotypical roles for comedic purposes (Duangwiset, 2017), contemporary *Mor Lam* increasingly constructs characters with emotional depth and significant narrative roles. Performers of diverse gender identities, particularly transgender women, now play important parts as singers, dancers, and comedians. Terms such as *kathoey*, *tom*, *modern kathoey*, and *LGBTQ* appear in the performances. These performers use the front-stage space to express themselves freely and challenge conventional gender norms. Audience interaction, including enthusiastic cheering and generous rewards without discrimination by gender identity, confirms that the *Mor Lam* stage has become a safe and friendly space where diversity is not merely represented but concretely celebrated and accepted.

**7) Reflections of Technology and Social Media:** Technology and social media have been fully integrated into performance culture. *Mor Lam* does not merely tell stories about technology; it uses technology as a tool to expand the scope of the stage and redefine itself. *Klon lam* and dialogues have seamlessly absorbed the language, behaviors, and phenomena of the online world, from contemporary slang used to communicate with younger audiences to depictions of occupations and lifestyles driven by digital platforms (Burarak, 2018), including online selling and cyber fraud. Performers themselves have become influencers and cultural entrepreneurs who use fame as capital for business expansion. Yet the most powerful reflection lies in live-streaming, which has revolutionized performance and audience interaction. It has broken the boundaries of the traditional stage, creating two audiences simultaneously: the physical audience before the stage and the global audience watching through screens, both of whom can communicate with and reward performers in real time through money transfers and digital gifts. Terms such as *check-in*, *screenshot*, *QR code*, *sticker*, *inbox*, *story*, *comment*, *Facebook*, *IG*, *LINE*, *live stream*, *smartphone*, *online world*, *digital wallet*, and *caption* vividly illustrate this shift. *Mor Lam* has thus used technology to create global fan communities and to connect cultural roots with the landscape of new media in dynamic ways.

**8) Reflections of Legal and Political Issues:** Political reflection has transformed *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* from a mere entertainment form into a public arena that reflects and advances legal and political issues. *Klon lam* functions as a voice that distills public frustration over the state of the nation, from livelihood problems, inequality, and corruption to calls for democracy. Comic dialogue provides one of the sharpest spaces for political critique, as comedians use satirical humor to mock politicians and failed policies, making sensitive issues more understandable while producing laughter embedded with resistance (Saengkanokkul, 2018). The appearance of contemporary political terminology, and even the names of world political figures, clearly reflects that Isan society is no longer detached from national and international news and politics. Audience reactions—loud cheers following politically critical verses or jokes—demonstrate consensus and confirm that the *Mor Lam* stage is a safe space where people can freely express their views. Terms such as *law*, *rights and freedoms*, *exercise one's vote*, *voice*,

marriage equality, and high prices exemplify this trend. Moreover, *Mor Lam* has elevated its own role by encouraging action, transforming discouragement into the energy to effect change by inviting citizens to exercise their democratic rights. Contemporary *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* thus proves itself to be more than a folk performance; it is a complex and powerful socio-cultural phenomenon. It serves as a mirror reflecting changes across all dimensions of Isan society—from economic and social structures to identity and politics—while also functioning as a vibrant space for negotiation, meaning-making, and the production of social discourse. In remarkable ways, *Mor Lam* has absorbed the challenges and realities of the age into the spirit of performance itself, affirming its ability to adapt and evolve so as to remain an authentic and meaningful voice for people in the present and the future.

**Reflections of Modern Cultural Life:** The modern cultural reflections found on the *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* stage reveal cultural dynamics and the construction of modern Isan-ness through the negotiation between traditional beliefs and newly defined meanings of “home.” At the heart of culture lies a system of beliefs and bonds connecting people to their place of origin, and the *Mor Lam* stage acts as a bridge linking inherited worldviews of the past with the values of contemporary society. In terms of beliefs, traditions, and ways of life, *Mor Lam* continues to transmit Buddhist moral teachings, narratives from folk literature, and customary practices such as *Heet Sip Song Khlong Sip Si* through *klon lam* and stage dialogues, thereby cultivating traditional values such as gratitude, humility, and perseverance. More importantly, however, *Mor Lam* reinterprets these values in ways that correspond to urban society and migration. At the same time, the stage becomes a space for reflecting the encounter between traditional authority structures and modern individualism, presenting characters’ inner conflicts as they choose between respecting seniority and asserting their own rights and desires. What emerges is therefore not static continuity, but an ongoing process of negotiating meaning, in which old values are adapted and old structures are challenged. Similarly, reflections of dwelling and home reveal complex dynamics. *Mor Lam* does not merely reproduce nostalgic images of rice fields and rural landscapes to console homesickness; it also presents the intense realities of urban life. The stage becomes a temporary simulated community that reconnects displaced people through shared language and identity, while also reflecting social transition through symbols of modern dwelling. Vertical forms of living, such as condominiums and rented apartments, represent the condition of migrant laborers who have not yet established stable roots. By contrast, signs of success such as housing estates reflect aspirations and the increasingly visible formation of class distinctions among Isan people themselves.

Thus, *Mor Lam* becomes a stage that reflects struggle and adaptation within new meanings in the context of urban society. Everyday culture—especially food and dress—serves as one of the clearest indicators of social change, and *Mor Lam* both reflects and actively propels these dynamics. Food culture on the stage does more than evoke emotional solidarity; it also becomes a space of social encounter through the introduction of foreign foods into dialogue and poetic verse. Western and Japanese foods do not appear merely as novel menu items but as powerful signifiers of contemporary values, whether aspirations toward urban lifestyles, the formation of more complex social status and class, or deep anxieties over forgetting one’s own cultural roots. The *Mor Lam* stage thus shows that Isan food identity is being continuously reconstructed and redefined. Likewise, dress culture functions as a cultural runway that reflects a harmonious blending of local textiles with international fashion and external trends. Clothing and accessories have become powerful languages for communicating and negotiating social identity in a consumerist era. Dress is used to display success, economic status, modernity, and social acceptance among younger generations, while also reflecting pressure to construct perfect appearances according to contemporary beauty norms. The widespread use of modern fashion vocabulary and related values on the *Mor Lam* stage confirms that this performance art acts as a crucial mirror of changing identity, where outward appearance has become inseparable from how value is defined in the modern world. The clearest phenomenon reflecting connection with the outside world is the culture of using foreign languages, or code-mixing, which has moved beyond simple communication to become a complex cultural practice rich in social meaning. When artists and audiences borrow and insert foreign words into conversation, they are reflecting adaptation and negotiation with globalization in significant ways. English has the broadest and deepest influence, signifying society’s full integration into globalization and modernity. Its vocabulary spans digital life, social media, content creation, influencer culture, entertainment, and Western lifestyles. The use of English thus functions as an expression of cultural capital, signaling modernity and participation in global culture. By contrast, East Asian languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean reflect different forms of influence. Chinese reflects long-rooted cultural integration through trade, food, and kinship, while Japanese and Korean reflect the influence of popular culture and soft power on people’s tastes and interests. The blending of these words with local dialect in seamless ways announces a hybrid identity, demonstrating that localness can persist and creatively negotiate with globality. Code-mixing thus acts as a mirror, showing that individuals are not merely communicating messages but continuously “communicating selves” and repositioning themselves within the global cultural landscape. The study of modern cultural reflections in *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* leads to the clear conclusion that this performing art is not merely a static transmitter of cultural heritage, but a highly dynamic social space that reflects, interprets, and helps construct modern Isan identity in profound and comprehensive ways. From the foundations of belief and spirituality, to everyday expressions through food and clothing, and finally to connections with the outside world through language, the *Mor Lam* stage demonstrates an endless process of negotiation between the local and the global, between inherited pasts and present challenges. It is a space where traditional gratitude confronts modern individualism, where the rural home encounters the urban condominium, where *som tam* shares the table with sushi, and where *pha khao ma* and *phae wa* silk stand beside global runway fashion. These phenomena confirm that Isan culture is not a fixed condition, but a process filled with adaptation, creativity, and continual redefinition of meaning, and that *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* functions both as the recorder and one of the most powerful drivers of that process.

**Reflections of Modern Culture:** The study of reflections of modern culture in this section focuses on analyzing change and the mechanisms through which culture expresses itself in contemporary society, considering multiple interconnected dimensions that form a complex network. The analysis begins with the conceptual foundations that shape people’s identities—beliefs, traditions, and ways of life—which constitute cultural heritage now challenged and reinterpreted amid social change. It then proceeds to examine values expressed through aesthetics in art and literature, which function as spaces of creativity and reflection on the modern world. This is accompanied by an analysis of physical forms through dwelling and habitat, which reveal negotiations between practical functions of modern life and efforts to preserve traditional cultural values. Furthermore, the analysis gives special attention to everyday cultural indicators of change, particularly food culture and dress culture, which signify not only personal taste but also cross-cultural blending and adaptation to local contexts. Finally, the study encompasses interaction in the age of globalization through the culture of using foreign languages, which is more than a communicative tool but also a gateway to adopting ideas and constructing multicultural identities (Appadurai, 1996). Taken together, these dimensions demonstrate that modern culture is not a static condition but a process of negotiation, adaptation, and ongoing creation of new meanings. Modern culture may thus be understood as a way of life that emphasizes adaptation to globalization, blending local identity with technology and global values into a culture more open to diversity and individualism. These characteristics are reflected through borderless communication, consumerism, and reinterpretations of cultural heritage so as to make it contemporary and responsive to life in the digital age.

**1) Reflections of Beliefs and Ways of Life:** *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances function as a lively cultural space for preserving, reflecting, and negotiating between traditional beliefs and modern ways of life. This is most clearly expressed through *klon lam*, which continues to sing stories from folk literature, myths, and Buddhist moral teachings that cultivate virtue and connect younger generations to their cultural roots. At the same time, new *klon lam* compositions reflect the adaptation of tradition to contemporary life, such as changing forms of merit-making in fast-paced modern society. Stage dialogues frequently incorporate the teachings of elders and beliefs in sacred beings or ancestral spirits (Wongthet, 2002), thereby reinforcing cultural identity and creating dialogue between old and new worlds, especially when characters confront problems that challenge older beliefs. An especially significant dimension is the interaction between performers and audiences, which becomes a concrete space for performing and transmitting tradition. Rituals such as paying homage to teachers before the performance, asking for blessings, chanting, and role-playing that expresses reverence toward sacred or supernatural powers all contribute to this process. Terms such as *miracle*, *Christ*, *Tai Hong Kong*, *Poh Teck Tung*, *scanning merit*, and *Thao Wessuwan wallpaper* appear in this context. Together with the distinctive communal dance gestures performed in front of the stage, these acts are more than performance; they are active constructions and affirmations of enduring beliefs and traditional ways of life that continue to circulate and transform within modern society.

**2) Reflections of Arts and Literature:** *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* is also a site for reproducing and transmitting valuable artistic and literary heritage, functioning as a bridge between ancient literature and contemporary aesthetics. At its core lies *klon lam*, the primary medium through which both written and oral literature of Isan is performed, including stories from the *Panyasajataka* and folk literature. *Mor Lam* artists do not merely retell these narratives according to original texts; they reinterpret and recompose them through distinctive styles and poetic conventions, requiring a high degree of poetic wit. At the same time, stage dialogues draw extensively upon the oral literary repertoire of *phaya* (aphorisms), proverbs, and rhetorical expressions (Nakwatchara, 2008), lending sharpness to dialogue and showcasing the linguistic intelligence of Isan culture. These dialogues also help elaborate or parody the main literary narratives in ways that make them more accessible. Performer–audience interaction transforms the performance space into a truly mobile literary arena. *Mor Lam* is thus not merely a reflection of art and literature; it is itself art and literature that continues to breathe and recreate itself in the context of modern culture. Examples include titles and expressions such as *Thao Pha Daeng Khon Ko*, *Deception Defeated by Love*, *Destined Love Eternal*, and *Finding a Wife for My Husband*.

**3) Reflections of Dwelling and Place of Origin:** *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* also functions as a cultural space that deeply reflects attachment to dwelling places and homeland, especially in a society marked by high levels of migration. This reflection is evident in multiple elements of performance. In *klon lam*, the content often describes the beauty of rice fields and rural landscapes (Turino, 2008), contrasting the simplicity of village life with the chaos of metropolitan life, and most importantly expressing homesickness and longing for the family left behind. Terms such as *rented room*, *apartment*, and *modern-style villa* appear in this context. These contents provide comfort and create emotional ties for those who have left home to work elsewhere. On-stage dialogue uses the Isan dialect intensively and often mentions specific villages, districts, and provinces, thereby generating intimacy and affirming local identity amid social diversity. Most importantly, performer–audience interaction functions as a temporary reconstruction of home itself. Artists greet audience members by asking which province or district they come from, inviting responses from Isan people or from people of specific provinces, thereby creating bonds and temporarily reconstituting a community of shared origin in front of the stage. For migrant workers, therefore, attending *Mor Lam* is more than entertainment; it is an act of affirming identity and reconnecting with one’s roots and place of origin.

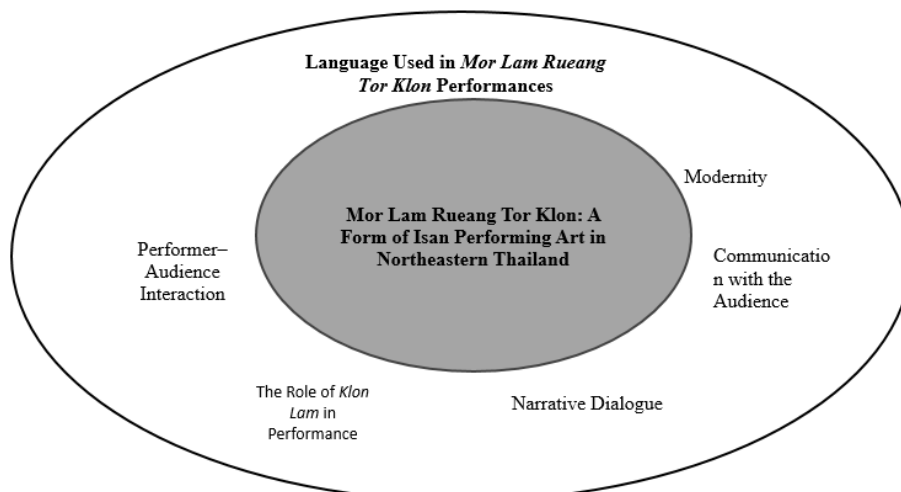
**4) Reflections of Food Culture:** *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances function as a space for reflecting Isan food culture, a crucial dimension of everyday life. This reflection is presented vividly and in close connection with the audience through various components of the performance. In *klon lam*, names of distinctive local dishes such as *som tam*, *larb*, *koi*, and *jaew bong* are naturally inserted into the text, often to compare love to something intensely flavorful or to describe festive atmospheres and abundance. Mentioning these foods not only evokes sensory longing but also reinforces a shared cultural identity. Stage dialogue, especially comic scenes, frequently draws upon food to generate laughter, whether through jokes about cooking methods, unusual ingredients, or comparisons between Isan food and food from other regions. These dialogues reflect pride in local food culture. Most vividly, performer–audience interaction reveals how food culture becomes part of the atmosphere of viewing itself. It is common for the front-stage area to be filled with vendors selling Isan food and for audiences to sit together eating *som tam* and sticky rice while watching the performance. Artists often address spectators by referring to what they are eating, creating familiarity and affirming the inseparability of *Mor Lam* and Isan food culture. In a changing society, food culture changes as well, as seen in the presence of sushi, Japanese food, noodles, and other foods within *Mor Lam* performance spaces (Duangmanee, 2018). Artists thus incorporate humorous references to these foods into their performances, including foods associated with Japan, China, and the United States, reflecting the presentation of modernity both through food in the performance space and in the content of *Rueang Tor Klon* itself.

**5) Reflections of Dress Culture:** *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* is also a vibrant fashion stage and a reflection of dress culture that interestingly combines traditional roots with modern trends. This reflection appears clearly through multiple elements of performance. In *klon lam*, clothing is not usually the primary focus, yet references to beautiful dress in local literature or to the styles of young men and women in different eras are inserted to reflect social contexts. However, the clearest representation lies in the physical dimension of dialogue and performance, where performers’ costumes become central to presentation. Local textiles are combined with garments such as *qipao* (or *cheongsam*), kimono, yukata, and Thai silk suits or evening gowns made from *phae wa* silk and *mudmee* cotton, together with modern and luxurious designs. This reflects efforts to elevate folk performance into a contemporary form with greater value. Comic dialogues also frequently parody dress styles, whether unusual youth fashion or clothing considered inappropriate to time and place, thereby generating laughter while simultaneously critiquing social values (Sudprasert, 2017). Performer–audience interaction further turns the *Mor Lam* stage into a runway for local people. Artists often compliment the dress of spectators at the front of the stage, while audience members themselves dress elegantly to attend performances as a means of expressing identity and social status. This interaction confirms that dress culture remains an important part of everyday life, with the *Mor Lam* stage acting both as a reflector of and a trendsetter for community fashion. Examples include terms such as *jeans*, *crop top*, *look*, *in-trend Gen Z*, *hoodie*, and *dress*.

**6) Reflections of Foreign-Language Use:** Finally, *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* reflects a significant linguistic and cultural phenomenon through the widespread borrowing and mixing of foreign languages into performance. This clearly reflects the adaptation of local culture to globalization. In *klon lam*, younger artists insert simple and popular English words or phrases such as *okay*, *story*, *hello*, and *I love you* into the performance content to create a modern feeling and communicate more easily with younger fans. The use of foreign languages in *klon lam* also reflects the experiences of migrant workers who must use foreign languages in their jobs. Stage dialogue is the clearest site of such language use, particularly among comedians who often mix Thai with English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and other languages, or pronounce them with an Isan accent for humorous effect (Singhnoy, 2015). Words such as *toxic*, *bak chang*, *annyeong haseyo*, *oppa*, and *ramen* illustrate this phenomenon. Such linguistic performance satirizes the values of urban society, where inserting foreign words into conversation signals modernity or higher social status. Performer–audience interaction further expands linguistic boundaries through live-streaming, where artists communicate with fans abroad and therefore use English greetings and expressions of thanks. The use of trending English slang to engage with younger spectators at the front of the stage also demonstrates that *Mor Lam* is not static but continually adapts to and reflects evolving linguistic culture in accordance with the times.

**5. Conclusion and Discussion:** Contemporary *Mor Lam Rueang Tor Klon* performances have moved beyond their former role as mere popular entertainment and have become vibrant sites of cultural practice in which modern Isan identity is complexly constructed and negotiated. One of the clearest mechanisms through which this occurs is the strategic use of linguistic dynamism. *Mor Lam* artists demonstrate remarkable sophistication in code-switching, employing the traditional Isan dialect to preserve cultural roots and emotional bonds with local audiences, while simultaneously using standard Thai to reach national markets and project professionalism. Moreover, the emergence of new forms of address and expressions influenced by business discourse, technology, and transnational culture reflects the transformation of Isan society from one once grounded primarily in kinship systems to one increasingly adapting to capitalism and the digital age. Such linguistic hybridity should therefore not be interpreted as a loss of identity, but rather as the production of an intelligent hybrid identity.

At the same time, *Mor Lam* functions as a discourse of the contemporary era and as a social arena that powerfully reflects the realities of grassroots life. The content of these performances records the wounds and frictions generated by entry into a consumer society, including cycles of indebtedness, the lives of migrant laborers, and the redefinition of “home” from a rural setting to condominiums and housing estates in large cities. Simultaneously, *Mor Lam* has elevated itself into an open and safe civic space for the critique of sensitive social issues, including gender diversity, the influence of technology, and the satirical treatment of political concerns. This underscores the extent to which *Mor Lam* has become a genuine social institution that actively questions and shapes public discourse.



**Reflections of Modern Society**

- 1) Reflection of Economic Conditions
- 2) Reflections of the Transition from Independent Occupations to Industry
- 3) Reflection of Migrant Labor
- 4) Reflection of Consumerism
- 5) **Reflections of Social Structure and Education**
- 6) Reflection of Gender Diversity
- 7) Reflection of Technology and Social Media
- 8) Reflection of Legal and Political Issues

**Reflections of Modern Cultural Trends**

- 1) 1. Reflection of Beliefs and Ways of Life
- 2) Reflection of Art and Literature
- 3) Reflections of Dwelling and Place of Origin
- 4) Reflection of Food Culture
- 5) Reflection of Dress Culture
- 6) Reflections of Foreign-Language Use

**Diagram Summarizing the Analysis of Reflections of Modern Society**

The findings demonstrate that the adaptive transformation of *Mor Lam* is most clearly evident in the diversity of troupes within the contemporary entertainment industry, with each troupe developing distinctive strengths in response to different dimensions of modernity. For instance, Rattanasin Intathai Rat represents a strong commitment to preserving traditional conventions; Prathom Bantingsin is distinguished by its grand, large-scale stage productions of legendary status; Rabieb Watin presents an image of luxury and increasingly globalized fashion aesthetics; Sinlapin Phu Thai foregrounds ethnic identity as a central feature on the main stage; and Saonoi Phet Banphaeng reflects technological advancement through the management of fan communities via closed online platforms. Collectively, these developments demonstrate that *Mor Lam* has transitioned from a tradition rooted in customary practices to a large-scale entertainment form and a fully developed mode of communication innovation within the digital era.

This study makes a significant contribution by challenging conservative paradigms that tend to regard local culture as static and to frame modernity as a threat. The findings dismantle the myth of cultural backwardness and instead highlight adaptation as a vital survival mechanism that sustains the vitality of *Mor Lam*. These insights lead to important implications for governmental agencies and cultural policymakers, suggesting a shift in paradigm from preserving culture in a fixed, past-oriented form toward fostering open spaces for creative expression. In addition, there is a need to support expansion into digital platforms in order to strengthen *Mor Lam* as a form of cultural capital capable of driving the creative economy sustainably in the context of globalization.

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