

EXPLORING MUSICAL HYBRIDITY IN FUSIONS OF *LUKTHUNG* AND THAI POP

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ABSTRACT

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While both belong to popular music in Thailand, *lukthung* and Thai pop represent distinct types of songs in the eyes of contemporary Thai music audiences. This article explores the potential to enhance the impact of Thai popular music in the increasingly competitive global music market by fusing *lukthung* with Thai pop to reach a broader audience. Based on a case study of the JOOX 100×100 project, this study employs a mixed-methods approach that combines comparative analysis of selected *lukthung* fusion songs with a semi-structured questionnaire that examines participants' preconceptions of *lukthung* and their responses to the selected songs. By evaluating the relationship between the reception and features of hybrids of *lukthung* and Thai pop, it proposes three hybridisation strategies that can be observed in *lukthung* fusions, namely Compensatory Blending, Sonic Masking, and Stylistic Transgression, arguing that the perception of the hybrid depends on the appeal of the interobjectivity within the hybrid and the genres involved. Ultimately, this article suggests how musical hybridity may effectively refashion *lukthung*, attracting more diverse attention to the genre and generating new interest in Thai popular music. In addition to providing directions for creating successful *lukthung* fusions, the findings are expected to enrich discussions on musical hybridity, which more often concern hybrids between musical styles from different countries or within Western genres.

Keywords: Musical hybridity; music fusion; popular music; *lukthung*; Thai pop

1. INTRODUCTION

Locally produced music remains a strong force in Thailand, but the music market still faces challenges from globalised music, along with shifts in audience preferences and the rise of localised content within the industry. In 2019, the leading music record label in Thailand, GMM Grammy, launched a special project with JOOX, a music streaming platform, namely JOOX Original Album 100×100 (JOOX 100×100), aiming to create a new musical phenomenon, encouraging audiences' openness to listening to music in a variety of genres, and refashioning *lukthung* [modern Thai country music] (JOOX, 2019).¹ This project

¹ Thai words in this article are romanised according to the Royal Thai General System of Transcription (RTGS), except for names of individuals; despite named modern Thai country music, there are perceptions of *lukthung* being old-fashioned due to its history and cultural meaning, which will be outlined later in this article.

involves collaborations between five popular *lukthung* singers, Mike Phiromphon, Tai Orathai, Monkan Kankoon, Phai Phongsathorn, and Lumplend Wongsakorn, and five pop singers/ bands: Boy Peacemaker, Dek Liang Kwai (DLK), Og-Anic, Getsunova, and Klear, respectively.²

Fusions of *lukthung* and Thai pop can be traced back to 2002 with Thai pop singer Bird Thongchai's album, *Chud Rab Khak* [Living room], which includes tracks sung in different Thai dialects and hybridises *lukthung* with pop, techno, and hip-hop (Jirattikorn, 2006). Besides solos by Bird Thongchai, the album also features a song performed in collaboration with popular *molam-lukthung*³ singer Jintara Poonlarb. With Bird Thongchai's influence as a legendary icon of Thai pop and Jintara Poonlarb's popularity, as well as the album's vision of rebranding *lukthung* as modern and a source of pride for Thai identity, the album has achieved a considerable commercial success (Jirattikorn, 2006). Other notable subsequent efforts include "Number One" by Bankk Cash (featuring Yinglee Srijumpol) (2014), which blends *lukthung* and dance-pop with English code-switching embedded in Thai lyrics, and "Wannakhadi Sichomphu" [Pink literature] by Paowalee Pornpimol (featuring Maiyarap) (2020), which fused *lukthung* with hip-hop. Yet, these subsequent pieces do not seem as representative as the JOOX 100×100 project, which drew the music market's attention to *lukthung* fusions through a wave of fresh collaborations. More importantly, not only does the project involve varied collaborations between *lukthung* and different genres, but each song is also produced in two versions: a solo version performed by a *lukthung* singer and a collaborative version sung by the *lukthung* singer with a Thai pop singer/band. This allows multiple direct comparisons between conventional *lukthung* and hybridised tunes to provide a radical view of the hybridisation strategies used and their effects, which would not be possible with other fusion songs.

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to examine the different strategies used in the JOOX 100×100 project and suggest how they may have contributed to the reception of the songs, guided by the research questions below:

1. How can the hybridisation of *lukthung* and Thai pop in the project be categorised into distinct strategies based on the manipulation of different musical signifiers?
2. To what extent do these strategies influence the cultural and musical perception of *lukthung* across different listener groups?
3. What underlying factors determine the success or failure of a hybridisation strategy in shifting the perception of *lukthung*?

By addressing these questions, this study provides insights into music hybridity within the Thai context as well as implications for promoting and producing *lukthung* for broader audiences in the contemporary era through fusion with other music genres.

2. THE HYBRIDITY OF LUKTHUNG AND THAI POP

The effect of hybridisation in music on the promotion of world music has long been recognised, especially in an increasingly globalised world (Feld, 2000; Taylor, 2007). While Holt (2007) highlights how genre fusion is used as a way for musicians to create new ideas, and Fellezs (2011) discusses how a phenomenon of rock, jazz, and funk fusion was once widespread a few decades ago, Moore (2012) takes a step backward, suggesting that the nature of popular music itself is a hybrid, with mixed influences from African American music and traditions in Europe. In fact, *lukthung* and Thai pop themselves are products of hybridisations as well.

The history of contemporary Thai music may be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when foreign musical elements were incorporated into Thai classical music and formed a genre called *samniang phasa* [accent language] (Myers-Moro, 1993), followed by the emergence of *lakhon rong* [dance-drama songs], which blended Malay and Western opera elements in theatre performances (Mitchell, 2015). These movements, along with the popularity of Western music since the twentieth century (Mitchell, 2015), have laid the foundation for the hybridity of contemporary Thai music. Later, *phleng Thai sakon* (literally meaning "international Thai songs" in English), songs that incorporate different Western influences sung in Thai and performed with traditional Thai singing styles (Siriyuvasak, 1990), started to arise as Juangjan Jankhana pioneered adapting melodies of classical Thai music into popular forms in the late 1920s, while performances of Thai classical music were restricted due to the monarchy's policy in the 1930s (Mitchell, 2015). Its development accelerated in the 1940s, when Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram initiated cultural modernisation in Thailand through a series of cultural

² In many cultures, a two-word name is understood as a person's first and last name, but for a notable number of Thai singers, it represents their nickname and first name. For example, in the name Mike Phiromphon, Mike is the nickname, and Phiromphon is the first name, not the last name, of the singer.

³ See section 2 for an introduction to *molam* and its relationship with *lukthung*.

mandates, including the airing of Western music on state radio, which exposed both Thai audiences and musicians to increased Western influences (Haanstad, 2016; Lockard, 1998). Since then, *phleng Thai sakon* has developed into a broader category encompassing different music genres, such as *ramwong* [both genders dancing in a circle], *phleng phuea chiwit* [songs for life], *phleng talat* [market songs], *string* [pop-rock], and *lukkrung* as well as *lukthung*.

Lukthung, which literally means *child of the country* in English, is commonly referred to as modern Thai country music (Jirattikorn, 2006). While some researchers describe *lukthung* as rooted in traditional Thai folk music and depictions of rural life and the working class, with integrated Western musical influences (Jirattikorn, 2006; Chetpatanavanich, 2008), Mitchell (2015) adds that the early form of *lukthung* is “a hybrid of *ramwong* and *phleng talat*” (p. 52), gradually developing with a mix of Thai, Western, and Asian influences through a process of “import, absorb and transform” (p. 75). On the other hand, *Lukkrung*, which literally means *child of the city* in English, became a direct competitor of *lukthung*, as its more Western-pop-oriented musical style and romantic narratives signify modern city life that contrasts with *lukthung*. Although *lukthung* originated from Bangkok rather than *Isan* [Northeast Thailand] (Chetpatanavanich, 2008) and up to the 1970s, the most renowned *lukthung* singers were those from central Thailand (Jirattikorn, 2006), as the genre evolved, it became dominated by *Isan* influences due to the large *Isan* audience and significant input from *Isan*-originated musicians (Miller, 2005; Mitchell, 2015). As a result, *lukthung* became tied to *Isan* cultural identity, and many *lukthung* songs in today’s market are sung in *Isan* rather than standard Thai. While this allows *lukthung* to be used as an effective form of political propaganda, for example, by the Communist Party in the 1970s and the Red Shirts to highlight the power imbalance in politics (Mitchell, 2011; Tausig, 2019), as the lyrics in the *Isan* language can either represent the lower classes in opposition to the political elite or facilitate the elite’s approach to rural citizens, it also causes *lukthung* to be perceived as distant by many Thais from other regions. This also reinforces the early ideological stereotype of *lukthung* as a rural or lower-class culture.

Lukthung songs usually adopt pentatonic melodies in the form of “A-A-B-A” (verse, verse, break, verse) with “minor chord progressions such as i–iv–v, i–iv–VII, and i–VI–III” and “sudden shifts to relative, tonic, or dominant major chords” (Mitchell, 2015, p. 46). A typical instrumentation of *lukthung* includes folk instruments like the Lao-origin *khaen* [mouth organ] and *phin* [three-stringed lute] along with Western instruments such as drums, electric guitar, bass, and organ (Mitchell, 2015). Its most prominent distinction is arguably the singing technique of *luk-kho* [heavy vibrato with voice coming up deep in the throat] and *uean* [melisma] (Jirattikorn, 2006), although Mitchell (2015) also noted that “[a] defining feature of *lukthung* is the frequent use of cha-cha rhythms” (p. 46).

Since both are popular in *Isan* nowadays, *lukthung* and *molam* are often discussed together. One key difference between *lukthung* and *molam* is that the latter places greater emphasis on its cultural function as dance music for social occasions (Lockard, 1998) and therefore tends to have a faster tempo (Jirattikorn, 2006). As a folk tradition of *Isan*, where a significant population is ethnically Lao and geographically distant from central Thailand but at the border with Laos, the lyrics of *molam* also tend to have strong Lao cultural influence. In addition, *molam* is characterised by a singing technique called *lam*, which involves singing “based on the word-tones” with “no fixed melody” (Miller, 1985, pp. 136–137). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for singers to sing both *lukthung* and *molam* and incorporate elements of each other in songs, resulting in sub-genres of *lukthung-molam* (mostly *lukthung* songs with a *lam* part) or *molam-lukthung* (*molam* songs blended with *lukthung* elements).

While both belong to popular music in Thailand, *lukthung* and Thai pop represent distinct types of songs in the eyes of contemporary Thai music audiences. In earlier literature, since the songs were primarily imitations of Western pop-rock, with guitars playing a dominant role, Thai pop was often referred to as *string* in Thai, under the category of *phleng Thai sakon* (Clewley, 2000; Siriyuvasak, 1998). However, regarding Thai pop as *string* is problematic today because not only are Thai pop songs no longer simple imitations of Western pop, but their sounds have also become more diverse. Thai pop songs no longer include only *string* but a mix of pop subgenres, integrating elements from R&B, hip hop, EDM, and so on. The commonality between Thai pop songs lies in the local cultural values embedded in them, which make them “produce a quite distinct form of popular music” (Hayes, 2004, p. 18). Therefore, Thai pop should be understood more accurately as a category of songs popular in the Thai pop music industry rather than a particular genre. Furthermore, in common usage, Thai pop songs are nowadays referred to as *phleng Thai sakon*, while *lukthung*, which was historically a genre within *phleng Thai sakon*, is now understood as a distinct genre that no longer belongs to *phleng Thai sakon*.

Although both are hybrid forms, a discussion of blending *lukthung* and Thai pop is practical, as they represent different kinds of songs, target varied audiences, and signify distinct cultural meanings. This implies a potential for blending to expand the reach of Thai popular music or to infuse new ideas into the music market. However, most studies on musical hybridity primarily focus on internal hybridisation between

Western music genres or the intersection of Western and non-Western genres, which are often viewed as appropriations of or imaginings of foreign soundscapes (Corbett, 2000). A specific focus on the fusions between Thai pop and *lukthung*, which considers hybridity within non-Western music and as a strategy for empowering marginalised musical styles (given Thai popular music's global position), is lacking. A case study that directly compares the musical content of *lukthung*-Thai pop hybrids, with an emphasis on musical analysis and audience reception, is therefore significant for providing new insights into the study of musical hybridity and fusion, as well as Thai popular music.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

To address the research questions outlined in the introduction, this article adopts a mixed-methods approach consisting of qualitative comparative analysis and a survey to study the case of the JOOX 100×100 project. By cross-referencing the analysis of the musical stimuli with qualitative respondent feedback, this study explores how different musical signifiers or short episodic elements function as strategic interventions in the negotiation of genre stigma.

3.2 Selection of stimuli

Although the JOOX 100×100 project consists of five songs, only three were curated as research stimuli, selected for their representation of distinct hybridisation strategies and their varied reception. The selected songs are “Hai Nan Kwa Thi Khoei” [Longer than ever] (Klear & Phai Phongsathon, 2019), “Ai Pha Ma Khao Pha Pai” [I bring it, she leads it] (Og-Anic & Lumplend Wongsakorn, 2019), and “Ma Non Na Doe” [Come and sleep] (Dek Liang Kwai & Monkan Kankoon, 2019).

To facilitate the analysis, the songs will hereafter be labelled as follows:

- **Song 1:** “Hai Nan Kwa Thi Khoei” [Longer than ever] (2019)
- **Song 2:** “Ai Pha Ma Khao Pha Pai” [I bring it, she leads it] (2019)
- **Song 3:** “Ma Non Na Doe” [Come and sleep] (2019)

3.3 Data collection and survey design

A semi-structured survey was conducted to evaluate the reception of collaborative versions of the songs. The survey targeted local audiences, namely Thai nationals. Respondents were recruited via convenience sampling from various online platforms, with no requirements regarding their demographic profiles, except that participants had to be 19 or older to focus on perceptions from individuals with a more settled adult perspective.

To maximise respondent retention, the survey was structured in two tiers. The first tier, consisting of quantitative items on respondents' general music listening preferences, impression of *lukthung*, liking of the singers, and ratings of the collaborative songs, was mandatory. The second tier, consisting of open-ended qualitative prompts on the respondents' views of the collaborative songs, was made optional. This design ensured a high volume of quantitative data to understand the general perception of the stimuli, while a nested subset of respondents provided qualitative data necessary for the inductive analysis of hybridisation strategies. Moreover, respondents were only required to react to selected excerpts of the songs, specifically those that best reflect the collaborative features, rather than the entire songs.⁴ This was done in consideration of respondents' attention spans, aligning with the reality that audiences typically have short attention spans in music consumption (Gauvin, 2018). This approach was also more effective at prompting respondents to evaluate the hybrid components in the songs.

3.4 Participant profile and categorisation

Overall, 159 surveys were distributed, yielding 131 valid responses, for a response rate of 82.4%. Invalid responses included incomplete submissions or responses submitted by non-Thai nationals and individuals aged under 19. This provided a robust dataset for establishing baseline genre perceptions and song ratings. Although respondents included residents from different regions of Thailand and individuals aged between 19–29 and 50–59, over half were in the 19–29 age group, and most resided in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region or Eastern Thailand. The gender ratio was approximately 4:6, with males outnumbering females. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of all respondents.

⁴ Excerpts provided to survey respondents for evaluation are “Hai Nan Kwa Thi Khoei (Klear & Phai Phongsathon, 2019),” 3:05–3:58, “Ai Pha Ma Khao Pha Pai (Og-Anic & Lumplend Wongsakorn, 2019),” 02:26–03:10, and “Ma Non Na Doe (Dek Liang Kwai & Monkan Kankoon, 2019),” 0:16–1:18.

Table 1: Demographics of all respondents ($N = 131$)

Demographics	$N = 131$	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	53	40.46
Female	77	58.78
Prefer not to say	1	0.76
Age		
19–29	73	55.73
30–39	48	36.64
40–49	9	6.87
50–59	1	0.76
Hometown		
Bangkok Metropolitan Region	49	37.40
Central Thailand (excl. Bangkok Metropolitan Region)	20	15.27
Eastern Thailand	33	25.19
<i>Isan</i>	18	13.74
Northern Thailand	3	2.29
Western Thailand	8	6.11
Southern Thailand	0	0
Place of residence		
Bangkok Metropolitan Region	58	44.27
Central Thailand (excl. Bangkok Metropolitan Region)	2	1.53
Eastern Thailand	68	51.91
<i>Isan</i>	1	0.76
Northern Thailand	0	0
Western Thailand	2	1.53
Southern Thailand	0	0

From this larger sample, a qualitative subset of 35 opted to provide open-ended feedback in response to the question, “Why do you like/dislike this song?” after they rated each song. This optional format was designed to minimise survey fatigue, which helped to gather more responses on the general perception of the songs and ensured that the qualitative data represents highly engaged respondents. Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the subset.

Table 2: Demographics of the qualitative subset ($n = 35$)

Demographics	$n = 35$	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	15	42.86
Female	20	57.14
Prefer not to say	0	0
Age		
19–29	18	51.43
30–39	15	42.86
40–49	2	5.71
50–59	0	0
Hometown		
Bangkok Metropolitan Region	7	20
Central Thailand (excl. Bangkok Metropolitan Region)	7	20
Eastern Thailand	7	20
<i>Isan</i>	6	17.14
Northern Thailand	7	20
Western Thailand	1	2.86
Southern Thailand	0	0
Place of residence		
Bangkok Metropolitan Region	7	20
Central Thailand (excl. Bangkok Metropolitan Region)	0	0
Eastern Thailand	27	77.14
<i>Isan</i>	0	0
Northern Thailand	0	0
Western Thailand	1	2.86
Southern Thailand	0	0

Respondents are categorised into three groups based on their pre-existing relationship with *lukthung*, measured through a familiarity filter and a baseline affinity scale. They were first asked if they knew about *lukthung* through a yes/no question. Then, those who answered with “yes” were asked to rate their affinity on a scale of 0 to 5 in response to the question, “Do you like listening to *lukthung* music?”⁵ Based on these results, the following groups were established:

1. **Positive listeners (Score 4–5):** Listeners who have a positive view of the genre.
2. **Neutral listeners (Score 3 or no knowledge of *lukthung*):** Listeners with no prior categorical bias regarding the genre or genre-specific expectations.
3. **Resistant listeners (Score 0–2):** Listeners who have a negative perception of or active dislike the genre.

By applying this three-group categorisation to the following analysis, the study identifies how specific hybridisation strategies interact with different existing perceptions of *lukthung*, shaping the audience reception of the stimuli and thereby inducing a typology of effective genre hybridisation.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Theoretical framing

To examine the relationship between musical hybridisation and audience reception, this study builds on Tagg’s (2012) theory of interobjectivity in music. Interobjectivity is the structural similarity between a target song and other music, reflected by “particular configuration[s] of different parameters of musical expression” (Tagg, 2012, p. 230). These expressions can be short episodic elements, such as a few notes or a particular chord, that can somehow carry meaning. Tagg (2012) asserts that interobjective analysis can help interpret the analysis object (AO) by identifying interobjective comparison material (IOCM; pieces that have a similar musical structure to the AO) and recognising the paramusical meanings of the IOCM, as the interobjectivity within implies the likelihood of semiotic similarity between the AO and the IOCM. For instance, if the AO has a sound similar to a number of IOCM categorised as mysterious, it is likely that the AO will be perceived as mysterious.

Although Tagg’s interobjectivity framework is established primarily for musical semiotic analysis, its assumption that objectively relevant structures in music can establish associations contributing to the perception of AO provides a structural way of understanding hybrids. It can be roughly translated as follows: the appeal of a hybrid can be drawn from the appeal linked to the genres it blends, and whether the appeal of those genres can be replicated in a hybrid depends on the degree of interobjectivity involved. This provides a basis for the current study to examine how the negotiation between *lukthung*’s traditional traits and listeners’ broader aesthetic preferences or expectations occurs under different hybridisation strategies in collaborative songs, potentially leading to different perceptions.

4.2 Baseline perception

Table 3 shows the baseline perception metrics for *lukthung* across different listener groups, based on the initial quantitative measures. The baseline mean for the positive group ($N = 41$) was $M = 4.41$, with keywords associated with a unique vocal style, family influence, appreciation of lyrical content, an easy-listening, a sense of nostalgia, and rural life. The baseline mean for the neutral group ($N = 50$) was $M = 3$, as the group included only respondents who rated “3” for their likeness to *lukthung* or claimed to be unfamiliar with it. Respondents have a neutral view of *lukthung* because they find other genres more appealing, *lukthung* sounds acceptable to them, or because they are drawn only either to the melody or the lyrics of the songs. As for the resistant group ($N = 40$), the baseline mean was $M = 1.28$, with keywords centred on language barriers, family influence, dislike of the lyrics and/or melody, and the perception that the genre is old-fashioned.

Table 3: Respondents’ baseline perception of *lukthung* ($N = 131$)

Listener group	Baseline (M)
Positive ($n = 40$)	4.41
Neutral ($n = 50$)	3.00
Resistant ($n = 41$)	1.28

Note: All means are reported to two decimal places.

⁵ Instead of a 5-point Likert scale, a 0–5 scale is used for respondents to indicate an absolute rejection with “0.”

4.3 Song 1: “Hai Nan Kwa Thi Khoei”

4.3.1 Song analysis

Song 1 is a collaboration between Klear and Phai Phongsathon. Klear is a band known for its emotionally charged pop-rock songs featuring romantic lyrics, such as “Sing Khong” [Object] (Klear, 2015) and “Phan Muean Hetphon” [Numerous reasons] (Klear, 2017). Unlike (many) other mainstream bands, Klear features a female vocalist. They tend to use more variations and transitional chords in their chord progressions, with fewer distorted guitar effects, which makes the music feel softer. Although well-versed in a different musical style, *lukthung* singer Phai Phongsathon shares a common feature with the vocalist from Klear: an expressive and soft voice that suits romantic lyrics. As a result, the collaboration between Klear and Phai Phongsathon emerged as a pop-rock-driven song with a simple, easily sung melody and a story about searching for partners in romantic relationships. The song starts with the voice of Klear’s vocalist, followed by Phai Phongsathon’s solo featuring typical *lukthung*-style singing skills in the second verse. Later, the two voices sing together, as is common practice in pop duets. The musical arrangement generally follows standard pop-rock instrumentation but also uses electronic drums instead of a traditional drum kit in the first verse. In the final appearance of the chorus, as in many pop-rock songs, it starts quietly at the beginning and later rises to full instrumentation with a four-on-the-floor rhythm on the kick drum. There is also a Thai flute featured during the intro, outro, and music breaks of the song to enhance the blend with *lukthung*. Another worth mentioned musical feature in the arrangement is the use of different riffs played by either the piano or the electric guitar. Yet, it avoids following the pentatonic scale to sound more modern. Throughout the song, the flute also plays occasional quick tremolo notes to imitate the riffs typically played by the *phin* and/or *khaen* in *lukthung* songs.

As for the *lukthung* version of Song 1, the iconic characteristics of *lukthung* are immediately apparent in the interchanging and overlapping solos of the *khaen* and the *phin* in the intro. These solos also appear in the outro and music breaks. Similar to the collaborative version, there are often different riffs between the lines of singing, but they are played by the *khaen* and *phin* as in regular *lukthung* songs rather than the piano and the guitar. There are also some differences in the chord progressions and musical arrangement between the two versions (see Figures 1 and 2). In addition, it follows the common practice in *lukthung* songs of hitting the snare and kick drums, as well as other instruments, in unison on every beat to create an accent (typically lasting five beats) before proceeding to another sequence in the song. This can be heard, for example, in the bar that transitions from the pre-chorus into the chorus. However, the lyrics remain the same as those in the collaborative version, being written in standard Thai rather than the *Isan* language used in many *lukthung* songs. Lastly, for parts sung by Klear’s vocalist in the collaborative version, the melodies in the *lukthung* version are slightly adjusted to suit a male solo vocalist.

Figure 1: Musical example of “Hai Nan Kwa Thi Khoei” (Klear & Phai Phongsathon, 2019). Musical arrangement and chord progression in the first chorus (0:52–1:20). Notation by the author of this article

The image displays a musical score for the song "Hai Nan Kwa Thi Khoei". It features three staves: Melody, E-Gt (Electric Guitar), and Drums. The Melody staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The E-Gt staff is also in treble clef with the same key signature. The Drums staff is in a simplified notation. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *mf*. Chord progressions are indicated by Roman numerals: I, V, vii, IV, and vii. The score is arranged in a system with multiple staves for each instrument.

Figure 2: Musical example of “Hai Nan Kwa Thi Khoei” (Phai Phongsathon, 2019). Musical arrangement and chord progression in the first chorus (1:10–1:40). Notation by the author of this article

4.3.2 Reception

Table 4: Respondents’ ratings on Song 1 ($N = 131$)

Listener group	Baseline (M)	Rating (M)	Change (Δ)
Positive ($n = 40$)	4.41	4.49	+0.08
Neutral ($n = 50$)	3	3.52	+0.52
Resistant ($n = 41$)	1.28	3.13	+1.85

Note: All means are reported to two decimal places.

As illustrated in Table 4, Song 1’s rating across all listener groups shows an increase compared to listeners’ baseline perception of *lukthung*. In particular, a significant shift is observed in the resistant group, whose mean rating improved by 1.85, effectively transforming them into neutral listeners according to the categorisation criteria of this study. Qualitative insights from the nested subset suggest that this quantitative jump is contributed to by a strategic combination of the strengths of both singers, as well as of elements from both genres that make the song aesthetically appealing to listeners.

Positive listeners mostly value the hybridisation of both genres. For instance, respondent #40 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand) comments that “*lukthung* sounds good, *string* (pop-rock) sounds good too. When they are combined, it gives the song the dimension of being more melodious”; respondent #10 (aged 30–39, male, Western Thailand), who describes *lukthung* as “easy-listening, easy to reach [the heart], the way of singing and melody are melodious,” also finds Song 1 “a harmonious combination of *lukthung* and [the] pop-rock singer”. In addition, while respondent #3 (aged 30–39, female, Bangkok Metropolitan Region) explains that she likes *lukthung* because she “likes the singing styles and *uean* which are unique in the old *lukthung* tunes as well as the lyrics” and does not consider herself to be a big fan of pop-rock and ballads, she “likes the vocals in the *lukthung* part” and thinks that “the modern lyrics are perfect” in Song 1. These responses show that positive listeners tend to focus on how similar musical expressions across genres interact to create a pleasant listening experience, without much concern about the authenticity of *lukthung*.

For listeners who hold a neutral opinion of *lukthung* or are unfamiliar with it, while some remain neutral towards Song 1, finding it to sound just fine, others recognise how the hybridity adds value to Song 1, making it appealing to them. As respondent #56 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand) reports, while she does not enjoy *lukthung* because she thinks the “beat” of *lukthung* is not “interesting,” making her prefer other music genres in general, she thinks Song 1 “is a combination of the two styles of songs perfectly”.

Alternatively, respondent #91 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand) focuses on how the *lukthung* vocal style fits well with modern lyrics.

Although a small number of resistant listeners in the quantitative sample ($N = 131$) remained negative towards Song 1, the reason for this is not entirely clear, as only respondent #28 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand) in the subset ($n = 35$) remained resistant towards Song 1. According to respondent #28, who rated *lukthung* a “0” but Song 1 a “2,” recognising Song 1 as a hybrid of *lukthung* and pop-rock improved her perception of Song 1, but this improvement was insufficient for her to perceive the song as neutral or positive. Nevertheless, many other resistant listeners realised how the blend with pop-rock makes Song 1 modern and appealing to them. In particular, some respondents who rated *lukthung* as a “0” rated Song 1 as a “4” or “5.” For instance, respondent #7 (aged 19–29, female, Bangkok Metropolitan Region) does not like *lukthung* at all and comments, “It is alright for those who like it, it has good meanings, but [...] I like listening to *sakorn* (international music) more than *lukthung*”. Nevertheless, she likes Song 1 and explains, “It sounds good. Featuring Klear makes the song more listenable because it is a mixture of the two genres.” Similarly, respondent #103 (aged 40–49, male, Bangkok Metropolitan Region), who thinks “*lukthung* is not international at all” and therefore dislikes it, appreciates Song 1 because “the singers come to collaborate nicely”. These responses show that it is possible to change a strong, initially resistant attitude towards *lukthung* to a positive one through an effective hybrid.

4.3.3 Strategy induction

The comparison between the solo and collaborative versions of Song 1 and their reception allows for the induction of a strategy that I propose as Compensatory Blending. This strategy does not simply leverage structural similarity with a genre with a higher affinity to re-contextualise *lukthung*, but rather draws on specific signifiers in the secondary genre that are compatible with the idiomatic core of the primary genre to enhance its aesthetic appeal. In the case of Song 1, it is primarily achieved by leveraging the melodious qualities of *lukthung* and pop-rock, exhibited through the melody and vocal styles that are commonly recognised by different groups of listeners and through the melodic *lukthung*-style riffs played by modern instruments, as evidenced by the comparative analysis of the solo and collaborative versions. Furthermore, while *Isan* lyrics in conventional *lukthung* songs play a crucial role in resonating with the *Isan* audience, they often serve as a barrier preventing audiences from other regions from engaging with the musical content. By using standard Thai lyrics about a romantic relationship, Song 1 not only made the lyrical content more accessible to a broader audience but also minimised a parameter of musical expression that typically triggers baseline aversion. As a result, the strategically selected structural and timbral expressions of pop-rock function as signifiers that help neutralise and compensate for the unfavourable friction associated with *lukthung* that neutral and resistant listeners have been experiencing in typical *lukthung* songs, while the preservation of some of the fundamental features of *lukthung* enables the hybrid to retain the support of its positive listeners.

4.4 Song 2: “Ai Pha Ma Khao Pha Pai”

4.4.1 Song analysis

Song 2 brought rapper Og-Anic and *lukthung* singer Lumplend Wongsakorn together for a collaboration. The songs of Thai rappers in the mainstream usually fall somewhere between R&B and hip-hop, and those of Og-Anic are no exception. Not only do they sound softer or smoother than conventional hip-hop, but they also often use traditional instruments, such as the piano and the guitar, rather than futuristic or highly digitised sounds. Likewise, the collaborative version of Song 2 incorporates elements of both R&B and hip-hop into its musical arrangement, including hip-hop-style drums and synthesisers. In accordance with the *lukthung* style, there are also cha-cha rhythms and riffs featuring pentatonic notes, played by the electric guitar and piano. The song follows a neat form of B-A-B-A-B (chorus, verse, chorus, verse, chorus). In the verses, Og-Anic raps and sings in standard Thai, along with modern slang and English terms, whereas Lumplend Wongsakorn sings the choruses in *Isan*. They do not have overlapping parts but take turns performing. In addition, the vocals in the song attempt to simulate the vibrato singing technique of *lukthung* by overusing a modern audio effect, namely *Auto-Tune*.

The use of *khaen* and other *lukthung* instruments marks the distinction of the *lukthung* version of Song 2 from its collaborative version, while the rhythm remains unchanged. In this version, the vibrato singing skills are back to their natural state, without the interruption caused by overusing *Auto-Tune*. This version also features different melodies for the verses containing *Isan* lyrics. Although the song still employs modern effects like distortion and *wah-wah* on the electric guitar, these features are common in the work of Lumplend Wongsakorn, as evidenced in his previous songs such as “Bun Kao” [Old virtues] (2018) and “Hor Mok Huak Pai Fak Pa” [Take tadpole to aunt] (2018).

4.4.2 Reception

Table 5: Respondents' ratings on Song 2 ($N = 131$)

Listener group	Baseline (M)	Rating (M)	Change (Δ)
Positive ($n = 40$)	4.41	3.32	-1.09
Neutral ($n = 50$)	3.00	2.10	-0.90
Resistant ($n = 41$)	1.28	1.45	+0.17

Note: All means are reported to two decimal places.

Although Table 5 shows that the positive and neutral listener groups' ratings of Song 2 dropped below the baseline, it is essential to note the growth of 0.17 in the resistant listener group's ratings, indicating that Song 2 may have a small effect on attracting listeners who are initially strongly resistant to *lukthung*. Qualitative data indicates that perceptions of Song 2 are largely dependent on listeners' cultural backgrounds and music-listening preferences.

For a few positive listeners who enjoy hip-hop as well as *lukthung*, the hybrid has satisfied their interest in both genres. Nevertheless, most positive listeners considered that the blend eliminated features of *lukthung* that they found crucial, making the song unappealing to them. For example, respondent #75 (aged 30–39, male, Isan) thinks that “the music is too modern”. Furthermore, respondent #84 (aged 30–39, male, from Isan to Eastern Thailand for over 5 years) even criticised the song for having “almost eliminated the melodious features of *lukthung*” and respondent #101 (aged 30–39, male, from Isan to Eastern Thailand for over 5 years) does not consider Song 2 to be *lukthung* at all. These two respondents, in particular, can be considered traditional *lukthung* listeners Isan as Respondent #84 states that “*lukthung* is the majority of songs [I] listen to,” while Respondent #101 explains that *lukthung* makes him “think of rural life, farmhouses, the smell of the countryside, and missing home after listening to it.” These comments reinforce the role of *lukthung* as a signifier of rural life, carrying significant meaning for migrants from Isan to other regions of Thailand.

While Song 2 became unfavourable for many positive listeners of *lukthung* due to the conflicts with their baseline perceptions, neutral listeners' responses to Song 2 are more straightforward; they either consider the song acceptable, but are not yet inclined to like it, or simply note that the song does not sound appealing, without making many remarks.

Song 2 yielded a mean score of 1.45 among the resistant listeners, but it received some remarkable comments. Respondent #28 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand), who likes listening to hip-hop, reports that “the music is modernised,” rating Song 2 as a “2” and *lukthung* as a “0” in general. Even though, according to the criteria of this study, a rating of “2” is insufficient to reach a neutral attitude toward the song, the responses indicate that the blend has had an effect. Similarly, respondent #86 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand), who likes hip-hop, acknowledges that Song 2 is “different from typical *lukthung*” and “sounds modern,” which results in a neutral response to the song. Still, more respondents tend to dislike Song 2 because they do not like either *lukthung* or hip-hop. For example, respondent #89 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand) thinks she “cannot get into it after listening [to *lukthung*]. The more there is Isan language, the more [she] cannot understand,” and she does not like hip-hop either. Although the excerpt of Song 2 provided to survey respondents includes lyrics sung in both standard Thai and Isan, it appears that the standard Thai part might not be sufficient to reduce the language barrier for listeners who cannot comprehend Isan, and the hip-hop features could elicit a new resistant response from listeners who hold a negative attitude towards hip-hop as well.

4.4.3 Strategy induction

The reception of Song 2 facilitates the induction of a strategy that is defined here as Sonic Masking. Instead of adapting the elements of the secondary genre directly into the primary genre for a harmonised, aesthetically appealing solution, it focuses on altering the perceived sonic experience to obscure stigmatised parameters of musical expression, thereby achieving interobjectivity between the genres. For instance, when the old-fashioned stigma of *lukthung* is perceived by some resistant listeners as being associated with the signature vocal vibration technique in *lukthung*, Song 2 used the modern vocal effect of *Auto-Tune* to mask these vocal vibrations. It also used synthesisers and modern samplers to emphasise the rhythm and perform pentatonic riffs, leading listeners to connect the song more with hip-hop than with a typical *lukthung* song. These efforts create a semiotic buffer that attempts to help listeners establish a new view of the stigmatised primary genre through its altered timbral surface. As the quantitative data suggests, this strategy allows a jump from a baseline of 1.28 to 1.45 in the resistant group when the stigma-triggering signifiers are sonically obscured, as listeners do not have to reconcile their cultural aversion to the traditional form of *lukthung*.

However, the efficacy of this strategy is determined by two interrelated fundamental boundaries. First, it depends largely on the listener's baseline perception of the secondary genre that provides the mask for the stigmatised primary genre. If the listener is resistant to the secondary genre, the masking attempt would likely replace the original stigma rather than promote positive change through the presence of a new signifier. As evidenced by the current study's findings, regardless of their initial perception of *lukthung*, most listeners who show a relatively positive view of Song 2 are not resistant to hip-hop. While the Compensatory Blending strategy mentioned earlier would not be completely free of this prerequisite, it depends much less on it, as it focuses more on the aesthetics of interobjectivity than on the masking attempt. Second, the Sonic Masking strategy is bound by a saturation threshold. If the masking signifiers are too strong and exceed the threshold and overwrite the features of the primary genre, they can strip away the primary genre's core and alienate positive listeners. For instance, one of the most common critiques of Song 2, especially from positive listeners, is that it lacks the melodious qualities of *lukthung*. Although musically, the melody of Song 2 is not completely stagnant, the excessive use of *Auto-Tune* has eliminated the natural drift in the vocals, leading some listeners to perceive a sense of flatness. Consequently, on one hand, the song can sound modern to listeners who are positively disposed towards hip-hop, but on the other hand, it becomes a monotonic tune to those who favour the melodious qualities of *lukthung*, which are conveyed through natural and expressive vocal expressions that contrast with the mechanically filtered sound produced by *Auto-Tune*.

4.5 Song 3: "Ma Non Na Doe"

4.5.1 Song analysis

Song 3 is a collaboration between DLK and Monkan Kankoon. While also a rapper like Og-Anic, DLK's musical style is closer to modern country, and he often sings and raps in a somewhat less fashionable tone. Such differences between DLK and other rappers are evident in his most popular song, "Yak Non Kap Thoe" [Want to sleep with you] (DLK, 2018), featuring Og-Anic. As for Monkan Kankoon, a famous *lukthung* and *molam* singer active since the previous generation, his songs usually follow traditional *lukthung* instrumentation with a particularly strong *uean*, a signature vocal vibration technique in *lukthung*. Thus, this pair of singers produced a collaborative work that sounds relatively similar to typical *lukthung* songs, with only a slight twist.

In fact, both versions of the song use the same backing track, making the collaborative version's musical arrangement very similar to that of general *lukthung* songs. The primary difference between the two versions lies in the melody and lyrics. In the collaborative version, DLK's verses are sung with rap-like, monotonic melodies, while Monkan Kankoon's lines are more melodic (see Figures 3 and 4). In addition, there are no overlapping parts between the two singers. Monkan Kankoon shows up late in the song, after DLK has finished the second chorus. Since DLK only sings in standard Thai and Monkan Kankoon only sings in *Isan*, the last chorus of the collaborative version, which combines lyrics from both, highlights the contrast between the two.



Figure 3: Musical example of "Ma Non Na Doe" (Dek Liang Kwai & Monkan Kankoon, 2019). Melody in verse 1 (0:17–00:35). Notation by the author of this article



Figure 4: Musical example of "Ma Non Na Doe" (Monkan Kankoon, 2019). Melody in verse 1 (0:15–00:33). Notation by the author of this article

4.5.2 Reception

Table 6: Respondents' ratings on Song 3 ($N = 131$)

Listener group	Baseline (M)	Rating (M)	Change (Δ)
Positive ($n = 40$)	4.41	3.12	-1.29
Neutral ($n = 50$)	3	1.42	-1.58
Resistant ($n = 41$)	1.28	1.13	-0.15

Note: All means are reported to two decimal places.

As evidenced by the metrics in Table 6, not only has Song 3 failed to overcome the baseline stigma, with the resistant group's rating falling below the baseline, but it has also caused the baseline of the neutral group to retract by more than half, representing a majority loss. The qualitative feedback suggests that this outcome results from an over-aggressive attempt to blend *lukthung* and hip-hop.

Although a few positive listeners maintain a positive response to Song 3, such as respondent #3 (aged 30–39, female, Bangkok Metropolitan Region), who enjoys the singers' vocal style, and respondent #109 (aged 19–29, male, Bangkok Metropolitan Region), who finds the song “interesting”, the group tends to emphasise how Song 3 lacks aesthetic appeal. For example, while respondent #26 (aged 30–39, male, from *Isan* to Eastern Thailand for over 30 years) appreciates Song 2 as it is “*lukthung* but the music is modern,” he could not find Song 3 appealing, since “the music at the beginning does not sound good” (which potentially implies the monotonic melody in DLK's part, as the backing track is essentially a typical *lukthung* song, and his response to Song 2 indicates that he is capable of identifying features of *lukthung*). Even respondent #52 (aged 30–39, male, from *Isan* to Eastern Thailand for over 20 years), who commented that Song 2 “has an interesting beat and is fine enough for listening,” he does not like Song 3 at all because “the melody is very old-fashioned”. Since monotonic melody lines, a feature of hip-hop music, are often regarded as modern attempts, the respondent's answer might seem confusing. However, knowing that he does not like DLK at all and DLK is well known for his old-fashioned yet playful singing style, it is expected that the respondent is referring to DLK's singing style, rather than the *melody*. This provides an additional potential reason for the differing reception of Song 3 compared to Song 2, despite both songs attempting to blend *lukthung* with hip-hop: DLK's controversial singing style. The findings show that, instead of focusing on judging the authenticity of *lukthung*, respondents' attention has largely been drawn to the song's aesthetic appeal.

For neutral listeners, the responses to Song 3 are characterised by different perspectives on its structural alignment with *lukthung*. For example, respondent #91 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand) thinks that *lukthung* “has beautiful lyrics and melody” but simply prefers other genres, making her a neutral listener, and she thinks that Song 3 “does not have the [features of] *lukthung* at all”. This indicates that she finds the lyrics and melody of Song 3 unappealing, which fail to align with the beauty of *lukthung*, even though it adopts a typical *lukthung* musical arrangement. In another way, respondent #48 (aged 19–29, female, Eastern Thailand) argues that Song 3's rhythm and melody are not well-balanced, suggesting that the hip-hop-style monotonic melody does not fit the musical arrangement well. However, respondent #11 (aged 30–39, female, Bangkok Metropolitan Region), who does not have a particular musical preference and is therefore classified as a neutral listener, rated Song 3 as a “4” while maintaining a neutral view of Song 1 and 2. She explains that “the song's beat is interesting, and [it] has the spirit of fighting for the good things in urban society” and suggests that the song could be perceived negatively if others do not think further about the meaning of the lyrics. It implies that Song 3 has the potential to appeal to neutral listeners who value lyrical content, and that it shares a structural similarity with *lukthung* songs through its lyrics, which can signify meanings related to home and rural life.

Lastly, the resistant group mostly find that Song 3 exhibits an improper structural alignment, making it unable to overcome their stigma towards *lukthung*. For instance, respondent #74 (aged 30–39, male, Eastern Thailand) dislikes *lukthung* because the *Isan* lyrics, which he cannot understand, make *lukthung* songs unable to reach him, suggesting that his stigma is largely caused by a language barrier. However, even though the excerpt of Song 3 provided in the survey consists only of standard Thai, he still thinks the song “is not listenable, does not sound good, [and it is] not very suitable for the music.” Still, respondent #103 (aged 40–49, male, Bangkok Metropolitan Region) represents an exception within the qualitative subset, as he finds Song 3 “fun, entertaining and up-to-date”, which transformed his complete resistance to *lukthung*, stemming from his consideration of its lack of international appeal, into a neutral view of Song 3. These varied responses suggest that addressing the listeners' most objectionable signifiers can sometimes improve perceptions of a stigmatised genre, although it appears to be fairly challenging to achieve significant change and depends on the weight of the objectionable signifiers in causing the stigma.

4.5.3 Strategy induction

Song 3 exemplifies a strategy of Stylistic Transgression, in which hybridity is achieved through a radical semiotic re-coding of the secondary genre's signifiers into the primary genre, without effectively resolving the potential conflicts. Thus, unless listeners appreciate the freshness of the conflict or are unaware of it while masked by a selective focus on a particular musical expression, this strategy has a high risk of failure due to potential aesthetic incongruity. For instance, while Song 3 does share interobjectivity with *lukthung* songs through its lively flow and nostalgic lyrical content, the misalignment of structural similarity led a large number of listeners to find that the monotonic melody conflicted with the *lukthung* instrumentation, making the issue go beyond concerns about betraying the melodious feature of *lukthung* or reinforcing of the existing stigma. As a result, negative responses can be easily elicited regardless of the listener's baseline perception of the primary genre.

4.6 Synthesis

As illustrated in Figure 5, Song 1 has the best overall reception among the three stimuli, followed by Song 2 and Song 3. This aligns with the reactions in the music market, as Song 1 ranked No. 6 in the "Top 100 by JOOX 2019" (JOOX Thailand, 2019) and has accumulated over 244 million views on YouTube,⁶ thereby achieving the best performance among all songs in the project. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that when ratings are compared with the baseline perception, Song 2 shows a moderate effect on an improved view of *lukthung*. Furthermore, rather than regarding the hybridisation of *lukthung* and pop-rock as a guaranteed success, and the blending of *lukthung* with hip-hop as inadvisable, the results stem from the hybridisation strategy involved rather than a genre-based formula.

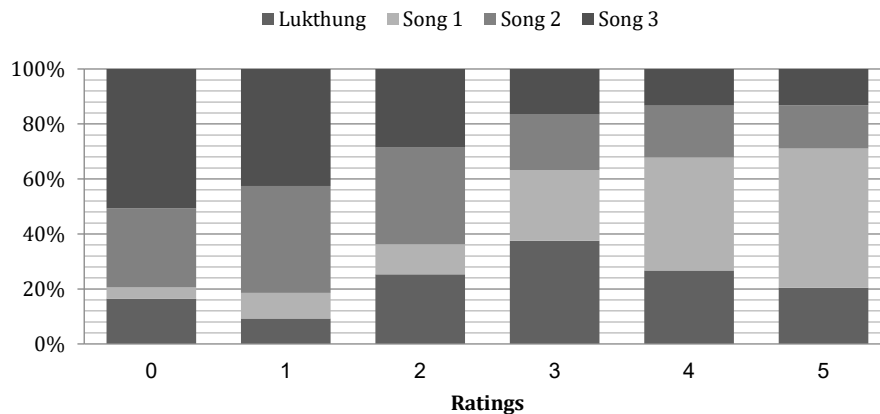


Figure 5: Respondents' ratings on *lukthung* and the stimuli used in this study ($N = 131$)

Specifically, the success of Song 1 lies in a Compensatory Blending that leverages the interobjectivity between *lukthung* and pop-rock to achieve an aesthetically appealing hybrid without betraying the melodious foundation of *lukthung*, which appears to be largely dominated by the vocal style according to the qualitative data. In other words, the secondary genre does not necessarily have to be pop-rock but can be any genre, especially when the reception of Song 2 demonstrates that a blend of hip-hop and *lukthung* is capable of receiving positive reactions from all listener groups to some extent, indicating that there may not be a genre limit for a *lukthung* hybrid, given that a suitable strategy is used and strategically implemented. For example, if the use of *Auto-Tune* had been less excessive, or if the masking had been implemented not on the vocals but on other musical expressions, it is possible that the reception of Song 2 could have been different.

The findings also suggest that the presence of interobjectivity between the hybrid and its relevant genres can potentially result in a reception similar to that associated with those genres (i.e., if a listener likes both *lukthung* and hip-hop, it is more likely that they will perceive a hybrid of these two genres positively), but this is still subject to the actual quality of the interobjectivity affected by the hybridisation strategy used.

⁶ As of 3 May 2026

5. DISCUSSION

In their study on collaborative songs between music artists, Ordanini et al. (2018) suggest that collaborating across genres is likely to achieve success due to its distinctiveness, which leverages the strengths of artists in their own genres, as well as a co-branding effect that helps gather fans of both artists. They also argue that collaborations may be more successful when the genres involved are less similar to each other (Ordanini et al., 2018). At the level of collaboration, the musical examples discussed in this study may be successful, especially among the singers' fans, as the analysis above showed how each has attempted to preserve the singers' style through different means, thereby aligning with the argument of Ordanini et al. (2018). However, for a broader discussion of musical hybridity and genre fusion, the varied responses to the musical examples in this case study, collected from the general audience, reveal that the key to success lies beyond the similarity or dissimilarity between genres.

According to Tagg's (2012) model, the more the AO is structurally similar to the IOCM, the more likely it is that the connotations connected to the IOCM will apply to the AO. By adapting this model to the current study to examine musical hybridisation, specifically between *lukthung* and Thai pop (i.e., a category of songs popular in the Thai music market with diverse genres), the findings support the argument that the interobjectivity between the AO (in the case of this study, the stimuli) and the IOCM (in the case of this study, pop-rock or hip-hop songs as well as *lukthung* songs recalled by the survey respondents), has a determining effect on the actual perception of the AO. Nevertheless, instead of counting on the degree of structural similarity between the AO and IOCM, this study suggests that the strategic compatibility, or the quality and appeal of the interobjectivity, is the key mediator of connotative transfer for music perception in hybrids. As a result, this study proposes that interobjectivity in a *lukthung* fusion represents the musical similarity between the fusion and other *lukthung* songs as well as Thai pop songs, and the ultimate success of the hybrid depends largely on the appeal of the interobjectivity within for the audiences that is produced in their mental space during the listening process. Figure 6 shows the conceptual relationship between interobjectivity and the appeal of *lukthung* fusions.

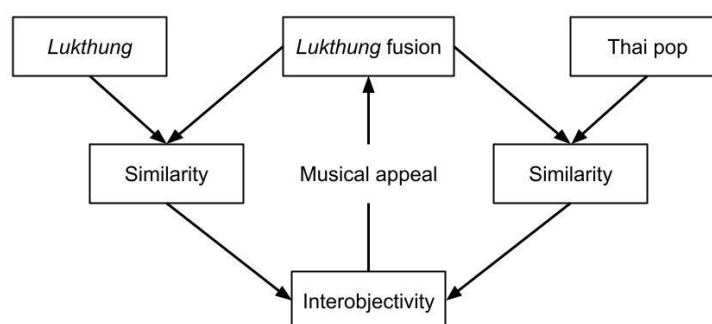


Figure 6: The conceptual relationship between the interobjectivity and its appeal in *lukthung* fusions

Any kind of successful fusion requires a careful selection of elements for the mixture (Fellezs, 2011). The next question, thus, is how the elements should be selected to achieve a likely appealing form of interobjectivity in the case of *lukthung* and Thai pop. There is unlikely to be a guaranteed formula for success that can be replicated due to the complex dynamics within songs themselves, as well as within audiences and the music market. Additionally, there are other possibilities for fusion that the current musical examples have not covered. Yet, this article proposes three different hybridisation strategies, namely Compensatory Blending, Sonic Masking, and Stylistic Transgression, of which Compensatory Blending is deemed easiest for aesthetic success. In the context of *lukthung*, it also appears that while melody and lyrics are important to some listeners, vocal skills seem to be a more significant player in the fusion, as they mark one of the distinct features of *lukthung* and play crucial roles in the effects of hybridisation strategies.

Even though Thai pop historically developed from imitations of Western pop music, it has undergone significant development and has become a form of contemporary Thai culture. Still, as a relatively modern form, blending Thai pop and *lukthung* could be regarded by some as a way of exploiting folk culture, depending on how the concepts of locality and authenticity are understood. However, as Feld (2000) suggests, in a globalised musical world, it is inevitable that “everyone’s musical world will be felt and experienced as both more definite and more vague, specific yet blurred, particular but general, in place and in motion” (p. 145), meaning that some kinds of fusion, blending, or hybrid forms are inevitable. Moreover, drawing on

Jirattikorn's (2006) words, "all nationalisms are hybrids" (p. 46); *lukthung* has always been a hybrid, and being a hybrid does not essentially mean betraying the nation. Instead, when the global music market values national musical differences (O'Flynn, 2007), Thai pop and *lukthung* can work together as cultural symbols of Thailand to strengthen the country's soft power.

6. LIMITATIONS

Additional perspectives from professionals in the music industry are important for enhancing the analysis of the current topic. It is also essential to recognise that the reasons behind trends and audience reception can be complex and sophisticated. In fact, the other two songs in the project that are not discussed in this study also demonstrated the Compensatory Blending strategy as well, but they were not chosen for deeper analysis, as Song 1 is considered more representative due to its reception, and this study seeks to focus on comparing different strategies rather than the effect within the same strategy. Further study on the varied reception of Song 1 and the two other songs that employ the same strategy is needed to deepen insights into the nuances of the implementation of the hybridisation strategy, as well as other factors that affect the reception of the fusion.

Moreover, the survey participants in this study may represent only a small part of the audience. In particular, the majority of respondents reside in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region and Eastern Thailand; input from the population of Southern Thailand is absent, and the qualitative data collected in this study rely on the engagement in a self-selected task rather than on a purposive sample. When investigating audience reception of the collaborative songs, and in order to concentrate on the collaborative features, only those excerpts that demonstrated the most significant collaborative elements were selected for respondents to evaluate in the survey. Therefore, further research would be required to gain a comprehensive understanding of how audiences recognise blended styles.

7. CONCLUSION

While the music industry has been constantly trying to localise global trends, the distinctiveness of *lukthung*, composed of its unique instrumentation and iconic vocal skills as well as the cultural identity it signifies, may actually help it stand out amid the intense global competition. Yet, this distinction has to be more widespread to achieve broader trans-regional influence.

The findings from this research suggest that there is considerable potential for *lukthung* to further expand its audience base. There also seems to be greater benefit in developing a new trend of *lukthung* fusion songs to form a kind of Thai fashion, thereby attracting a larger audience and breaking audiences' preconceptions about old *lukthung* songs and facilitating sustainable development for the local music industry. In fact, at the time of preparing this article, more *lukthung* fusions are also being seen in the music market, including not only the two subsequent seasons of the JOOX 100×100 project but also "Kularb" [Rose] by F.Hero, featuring Karntong Toongngern and Saran (2025), and "Sathu" by Asia7, featuring Plai Kanokporn (2025), which have been well received. Meanwhile, recent success in adapting a pop-ballad musical arrangement for *lukthung* can be seen in songs such as "Kae Bon" [Offering] by Karntong Toongngern (2025). These examples further solidify the potential to promote *lukthung* fusions or to lead an evolution of *lukthung* to achieve both aesthetic and cultural success.

Lastly, since this study extends Tagg's (2012) interobjectivity framework for understanding connoted musical meaning to perceptions of musical hybridity and proposes three hybridisation strategies, it is expected to provide directions for future research on music fusion and hybridisation, as well as for hybridisation practices in the music industry.

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DECLARATION

1. Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

2. Generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

No generative AI and AI-assisted technologies are used.

3. Data availability statement

The raw data cannot be shared at this time due to confidentiality obligations and the consent agreements with participants.

4. Ethics statement

A statement confirming that informed consent was obtained from human participants.

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