



# Jaeng Klaisithong: The First Interview with Thailand's National Singer

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## 研究ノート

# タイの人間国宝、ジャエン・クライシトン氏 とのインタビュー

田口哲也、ジョン・ソルト

このたびタイの "National Artist" であるジャエン・クライシトン氏とのインタビューを行うことができた。インタビューを行ったのはハーバード大学ライシャワー研究所のジョン・ソルト氏である。インタビューにはジャエン氏との連絡にあたり、また通訳をお願いすることになったバンコクのイタリア大使館勤務ソムスリ・ポップピブグトラ氏、氏の同僚であるスワンナ・チャートシングトン氏、それに同志社大学文化情報学部の田口が同行した。

## 解題

"National Artist" は日本の「人間国宝」に相当する名誉ある称号である。歌手としての "National Artist" はジャエン氏を含めてたった2人であることから分かるようにジャエン氏は極めて貴重な芸術家である。

以下はそのインタビューであるが、若干の解説とインタビューにいたることになった経緯を記しておきたい。

私たちとジャエン氏との邂逅は2005年8月のチャオプラヤ河を遡る船上でのことである。このときタイの詩人であるモンリー・ウマヴィジャニ氏がタマティベス王子没後250年の記念行事を企画した。モンリー・ウマヴィジャニについては「言語文化」(同志社大学言語文化学会)第3巻第2号の田口によるインタビュー記事を参照のこと。

タマティベス王子(1715~1755)はアユタヤ朝末期の大詩人で、記念式典は詩人との関係が深いアユタヤの寺院で行われた。タマティベス王子は悲劇の詩人である。彼の愛した女性は王の側室となり、しかも、この悲恋はタマティベス王子の処刑という驚くべき悲惨な結末を迎える。そしてこの悲劇の直後にアユタヤ王国はビルマの侵略を受け、言語を絶する破壊と略奪の後、金色に輝くアユタヤ王朝は廢墟となり滅亡する。

イタリア、ルーマニア、アメリカ、日本からそれぞれタマティベス王子の作品を各国語に翻訳した詩人・学者が招待され、それぞれがイタリア語、ルーマニア語、英語、日本語で詩人の作品を朗読するという催しがあり、アメリカからはこのインタ

ビューを行ったジョン・ソルト氏、日本からは田口がそれぞれ招聘を受けた。私たちは袋に入れられて撲殺された王子の魂を供養するために朗読を行ったのだ。

記念式典は僧侶による読経に始まり、モンリーによる基調講演、原詩と翻訳の朗読会などを経て、その後、王子が実際に行った船旅を丸ごと追体験する試みがあり、式典の参加者の多くは船に乗り込んでチャオプラヤを遡り、仏陀の足跡を見学することになった。その船上で、伝統音楽が演奏されジャエン氏の歌が披露されることになった。特にジャエン氏によるタマティベス王子の歌は秀逸で、このまれな機会をタイ人以外で経験しえたソルトと田口はすぐさまジャエン氏の歌が入ったテープを入手し、インタビューの機会をうかがうことになった。紆余曲折を経て実現したインタビューは以下のとおりである。

なお、タイ語は中国語や朝鮮語と同様に有気音と無気音で意味の対立が起こる。ジャエン氏の発音は実際には「チャエン」と「ジャエン」の中間くらいの音であるが、「チャエン」と記すともとの発音から大きく異なってしまうので、ここでは便宜上「ジャエン」と記すことにした。それからインタビューの中で "2478 [1935]" のように2で始まる4桁の数字が出てくるが、これは仏年である。タイでは通常は西暦ではなく仏年を用いる。

### JAENG KLAISITHONG: THE FIRST INTERVIEW WITH THAILAND'S NATIONAL SINGER

I interviewed singer Jaeng Klaisithong, designated by the Thai government as a National Artist, at his home on 28 January 2006. Somsri Pobpipugtra kindly acted as my interpreter. Jaeng's wife, Boonrat Phohiran, Suwanna Chartsingthong, and Professor Taguchi Tetsuya of Doshisha University were also present, as well as a taxi driver who later attempted to swindle us.

Khun (the honorific like "sama" or "san" in Japanese and "Mr." in English) Jaeng is a dignified, sophisticated gentleman who puts on no airs. He has reached the pinnacle of his art, and he walks around his unpretentious yet cozy house in a hand-woven, cloth skirt. He and his wife offered us a large bowl of tropical fruits. While answering questions, Khun Jaeng made sure that the taxi driver was amply fed. Children and grandchildren came and went. The room - his studio - had aging photos of him with the King and other royalty, and their wedding photo.

His relationship with the Thai musical tradition was palpable, yet his absolute calmness and relaxedness were disarming. In the photos he had a military posture and dignified air appropriate to the occasion, but in the comfort of his home, way off the highway, he couldn't have been more laid-back and affable. Visiting the location he was born and lived in all his life, I could see the organic connection between the land and the music.

Despite his numerous honors and the encroachment of the post-modern world with its techno-gimmicks, he seemed to be living a similar lifestyle to his ancestors. And it didn't seem like a conscious attempt to hang onto a golden past as with so many who return to nature after a lifetime in the city. The pure simplicity in Khun Jaeng's marvelous voice has governed his life and continues to do so. His gracious singing, like the act of breathing in and out, on the surface appears as nothing special, yet it underpins everything else about his world.

--John Solt



写真1: Khun Jaeng as a young man acknowledged by H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX of the Chakri Dynasty).

John Solt: Khun Jaeng, it's a pleasure to see you again and thanks for consenting to this interview. When and where were you born?

Jaeng Klaisithong: Hi. I was born on January 10, 2478 [1935], right here in Bang Thaten Village, Song Pinong district in Suphan Buri province.

Q: Khun Somsri told me that Suphan Buri has been famous as the birthplace of many singers, musicians, and artists, that it's been one important cultural locus for a long time. What are your first memories of listening to Thai classical singing, the genres that became your lifework and livelihood? Did you hear the music first on records or live?

Jaeng: As a child I instinctively picked up and played with instruments that I found at home and in the homes of friends. My future wife's grandparents - Sanit and Lamjiak - lived nearby, and at eleven years old I went there to play instruments and sing. They were singer-musicians who taught the arts in - as you described - a place happening for the arts. They regularly performed in the village festivals held at the local temple, and in time I performed with them.

At twelve or thirteen years old I was first acknowledged by the public to have a modicum of talent. My wife's grandparents, who as I said were my teachers, paid me one baht to perform in their troupe. The public, on the other hand, added to their one baht with ten or even twenty baht tips. Such easy cash was eye-opening for me as a child. As a teenager I already was earning a lot, relative to other country children, but I also spent it like water, the way all teenagers do. From then on, I knew I loved to sing. When I turned 16 [1951], after five years of having studied with my future grandparents-in-law, I moved from the country to Bangkok. I then had several teachers in succession (Jamlong, Chote and Cheum Duriyapranee, Chaemchoi Duriyaphand and Suda Kiewvijit), but for the most part I learned from listening endlessly to cassette tapes. There was no television in those days - only radio - and the "Like" outdoor theater, for which I sang in those days, was in its heyday.

Q: When was your first radio appearance?

Jaeng: When I was 21 [1956]. During that period I was doing my compulsory military service, and I could sing on the radio only on Saturdays and Sundays. After



写真2: Drums, a Hanuman monkey mask used in classical Ramakien performances, and a grandchild's hoola-hoop show fragments of everyday life in a corner of Khun Jaeng's living room.

I finished the military service, I could sing also on weekdays, after that I was more regularly featured on the radio.

Q: When did you turn professional?

Jaeng: After a singing contest that I entered. Luckily, I won first prize, and then I was introduced to the Fine Arts Department at the Ministry of Education, which housed classical artists and scholars. I turned professional then, when I was 24 or 25, and I've been in the world of Thai classical music and theater ever since. It's already been almost half a century. Now one of the singers in the Fine Arts Department - Kamjorndech Sodsangjan - is a former student of mine, how the wheel revolves and the years pass!

Q: Your story is a version of American Icon, Thai old style. I find it fascinating how sometimes sheer talent is recognized, like yours, and the artist rises like cream. Were your teachers - your grandparents-in-law - also acclaimed as National Artists?

Jaeng: No, there was no such designation at that time.

Q: When did you become a National Artist?

Jaeng: In 2538 [1995], when I was 60 years old.

Q: How many Thai National Artists are singers?

Jaeng: There are two of us. Chai Muangsing (official name Somsien Phanthong) was nominated as a folk and country singer.

Q: Do you think any of your students have the potential to become National Artists?

Jaeng: Yes, there are two possibilities, one at Silpakorn University and one at Chulalongkorn University, both men.

Q: I read recently that National Artists get three perks with the honored distinction, 1) a stipend of 12,000 baht [\$300] per month, 2) 15,000 baht [\$375] for a funeral, and 3) 120,000 baht [\$3,000] for a book to commemorate the life and work of the artist. Can you survive on the stipend?

Jaeng: Yes, comfortably, because I also receive a pension and do a variety of paying jobs on the side, such as visiting professor in colleges and high schools, and performer at classical Thai events. I draw three salaries and lead a country life next to a river, so I have no complaints.

Q: Have you ever performed outside Thailand?

Jaeng: Yes, I went on a two-month tour with a troupe of Thai classical musicians and dancers in the 1970s, when I was over forty. We toured Spain, France, Italy, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, U. K., U.S.S.R., and U.S.A.

Q: Did you ever find that dancers treated you as peripheral?

Jaeng: No, not at all. I've never encountered ego problems with dancers or other musicians. We create as a team. I love performing both solo and with the accompaniment of musicians and dancers. Each approach can be great fun.

Q: Your voice is soulful and communicates directly. What physical training do you do to achieve and maintain such a rotund voice?

Jaeng: I did singing exercises over the years. For example, to sing this one phrase [he sings for a few syllables, voice descending and ascending] I would repeat it over and over, not for minutes or hours or days, but for months. That's how I mastered it, there's no other way. That's how I learned each of the songs, little by little, over the years.

Q: Is it purely a physical mastering, or is it also your lifestyle and way of thinking that influences your unique sound?

Jaeng: It's of course body and mind together. I must admit that I don't practice singing much these days, except when I'm teaching, that's enough to keep my voice in shape. No need to overdo it (laughs).

Q: For how long have you been singing the songs of Prince Thammatibes (1715-1755) and Sunthorn Phu

(1786-1855), two great Thai literary figures?

Jaeng: Oh, for a long time, my whole life.

Q: Have you ever performed with HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, a fine musician who also has been active in reviving and supporting Thai traditional arts?

Jaeng: Yes, she supplies the music and I sing, it's always a wonderful experience.

Q: In Japanese songs of the Edo period (1600-1868) and with much of the rhythm and blues in the USA, a given song can be sung either by a man or a woman. Are Thai classical songs gender-specific or gender free?

Jaeng: Men don't sing women's songs and vice versa. The context of the song determines if a man or woman sings it. There is no gender flexibility experienced in the Thai case as you mentioned with those examples.

Q: In East Asia there is the tendency with all the arts to follow the master as much as possible. Individuality

is a natural consequence of what occurs because perfect imitation is impossible, but it is not sought as an end in itself. How about with Thai singing?

Jaeng: Well, the basic is imitation of the master, but then the idea is to be free and add your individual imprint on the song.

Q: That sounds closer to the Western approach. What do you think of European classical music in general?

Jaeng: When I was in the USA on tour, whenever I had free time I went to attend music concerts. In one small hall I remember listening to beautiful music, and I realized that even though it was different from Thai classical music - there was logic to its timing - and I caught it intuitively. I got the rhythm, the tone, the pitch, and it was an epiphany to penetrate the mechanism of that music. Western music could never sound alien to me, especially after that pleasurable experience.

Q: Do you sing in the village these days?

Jaeng: No, not unless there is an official function.



写真 3: Through the spirit houses at Khun Jaeng's backyard we can glimpse the rolling river.

Q: Does your wife also sing?

Jaeng: No, she doesn't. Besides her grandparents, her mother was also a good singer. It seems to have skipped her generation (and come all to my side!) but our fourth daughter, Kanittha, works as a singer at the Royal Thai Navy, Department of Music, and I'm gratified to observe the transmission continuing across generation and gender.

Q: I noticed after one of your concerts that your wife watches you answer questions about your art, but then she moves to protect you from the mundane world by acting as manager in any business discussions. Is that a correct perception?

Jaeng: Of course we consult, but she is my manager and also does a fine job with the family finances.

Q: Thanks for your time, Khun Jaeng, you've been most gracious and hospitable. Just one last question that I can't avoid asking a National Artist: Do you ever sing in the shower?

Jaeng: What? Uh, no I don't.

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写真4: National Artist Khun Jaeng, the equivalent of Japan's "Living National Treasure," relaxes on his front porch.