Lanna Performing Arts and Natural Conservation: Exploring Pathways and Possibilities in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This research investigates the potential of Lanna performing arts as a medium for fostering environmental awareness and promoting community engagement. Drawing on artistic and practice-led research methodologies, it explores how traditional performance practices can convey ecological knowledge and respond to contemporary environmental concerns.

The study centers on two creative works rooted in Lanna traditions but differing in form and emphasis. Both integrate Lanna dance as a key expressive element. The first draws on beliefs in sacred forests, using bodily movement, traditional string instruments, and evocative silence to evoke the spirit of nature. The second presents local watershed knowledge through newly composed *phleng so* (Lanna poetic song), recorded community interviews, and images from Ban Ko village's creative process.

Comparative analysis reveals that Lanna performing arts can serve as a "language of nature"—a sensory, embodied form of storytelling rooted in rhythm, sound, memory, and cultural identity. These works demonstrate how art can function as a knowledge-making process grounded in lived experience, place-based practices, and cultural engagement.

The study also raises critical questions: Are digital platforms sufficient to generate meaningful impact? Can art become a sustainable tool for social transformation? While it offers no definitive conclusions, the research highlights how Lanna performance, when interwoven with local wisdom and digital innovation, can foster dialogue between humans, nature, and culture in the digital age.

Keywords: Lanna performing arts, Environmental Conservation, Artistic Research, Digital Media, Community Engagement

Introduction

Amid escalating environmental crises—such as climate change, deforestation, and water pollution—that threaten ecosystems, human well-being, and global biodiversity (IPCC, 2023), there is a pressing need for communication strategies that resonate deeply with people and inspire meaningful action. Art, as a powerful medium, has long served to reflect and respond to social, cultural, and environmental challenges. In Thailand's northern region, Lanna performing arts are deeply embedded in the lifestyle, beliefs, and spiritual worldview of the people (Damrhung, 2021). Integrating these cultural expressions with contemporary concerns presents a promising pathway for fostering ecological awareness and cultural continuity.

This research explores the potential of Lanna performing arts as a communication tool to promote environmental awareness and encourage community engagement. Drawing on Artistic Research and Practice-led Research methodologies, it investigates how performance can operate as both a creative and epistemological framework to address real-world environmental issues. While interest in eco-performance and arts-based sustainability research is growing globally, there remains a gap in studies that examine how regional performance traditions—particularly Lanna dance forms—can be meaningfully combined with community knowledge and digital technology to support environmental discourse and action.

The study centers on two original creative works. The first is a non-verbal dance performance integrating Fawn Lanna and traditional music to reflect the beliefs of local knowledge holders regarding the spirit of the forest. Through expressive movement and rhythmic composition, this piece invites audiences into an emotional and sensory experience that encourages reflection on human–nature relationships. The absence of spoken language creates an open interpretive space, allowing personal meaning-making to emerge through affect and embodiment.

The second piece adopts a participatory approach by weaving interviews and narratives from the Ban Ko community in Lamphun Province—a key site for watershed forest conservation—into the performance structure. These authentic voices are integrated with Lanna dance and music, transforming the stage into a dialogic space that highlights the interdependence between humans, forests, and water systems. The piece emphasizes local agency and illustrates how community-based ecological practices can be communicated through artistic form.

Beyond the performances themselves, this research critically explores how digital media can serve as a platform for dissemination and social impact. As Damrhung (2021) explains, "*performance research is a broad and fairly new set of approaches for doing artistic research in the field of performance*" (p. 375), especially effective in "*contemporary performing arts arenas that emerge in mixed and changing cultural contexts, and [that] encourage interdisciplinary vision and international involvement*" (p. 376). The fusion of traditional forms, local knowledge, and digital tools exemplifies this approach and reflects the evolving nature of Thai performance in a globalized world.

Moreover, Damrhung (2021) emphasizes that performance research seeks to "*create distinctive and viable spaces and embodied knowledge for contemporary Thai performance*" (p. 377). This study aligns with that aim by demonstrating how Lanna performing arts can become a conduit for community dialogue, environmental consciousness, and cultural resilience. It raises critical questions: *Is online dissemination alone sufficient to catalyze real change? How can performing arts evolve into sustainable tools for social transformation?* While experimental in scope, this research offers a model for integrating artistic practice, local ecological wisdom, and digital innovation to address pressing environmental and cultural issues in the digital age.

Definition of Key Terms

Forest Ordination: A Buddhist-influenced ritual common in Northern Thailand that symbolically ordains trees to protect forests from destruction. It reflects spiritual beliefs about the sanctity of nature and is often used as a cultural tool for conservation.

Watershed Management (Lanna context): Community-based strategies in Northern Thailand that integrate ecological knowledge, rituals, and sustainable practices to manage headwater forests and water sources.

Fawn Lanna (Lanna Dance): Traditional Northern Thai dance characterized by graceful movement and symbolic gestures, often embedded within ritual or communal contexts.

Practice-led Research: A methodology where artistic creation is central to the research process and contributes to the generation of new knowledge.

Purpose

3.1 To investigate how Lanna performing arts can serve as a medium for communicating environmental awareness and ecological wisdom through embodied and community-rooted practices.

3.2 To analyze two creative research works that recontextualize traditional Lanna performance in response to contemporary ecological issues, highlighting how artistic practices can contribute to knowledge-making in the digital age.

Literature Review

This article synthesizes insights from two distinct creative research projects, both exploring the capacity of Lanna performing arts to serve as a vital tool for environmental communication and natural resource conservation. Situated within the evolving fields of digital arts and environmental humanities, this study necessitates a comprehensive review of existing scholarship. The literature review is organized into five key thematic areas: (1) Concepts of Artistic Research and Practice-led Research; (2) Lanna Cultural Ecosystems and Traditional Performance; (3) Art as Environmental Communication; (4) Technology and Digital Media in Arts Dissemination; and (5) Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Conservation.

This study draws upon two original creative research projects. The first, The Creation of Contemporary Performing Arts Based on Forest Ordination Derived from Lanna's Belief is to Promote Forest Conservation, explores how ritual-based performance rooted in forest ordination ceremonies can promote ecological consciousness. The second, The Wisdom, Intelligence, and Creativity in Watershed Management of Lanna Community: The Media Presentation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts, focuses on translating local ecological wisdom into contemporary performance and multimedia forms. Together, these works serve as case studies that embody the intersection of traditional knowledge, artistic practice, and digital innovation in addressing contemporary environmental concerns.

This integrated review aims to build a robust theoretical foundation for analyzing these two artistic case studies and their potential to foster environmental awareness and social change in the digital age.

Artistic Research and Practice-led Research: Generating Embodied Knowledge

This article adopts a Practice-led Research methodology, emphasizing that profound knowledge can emerge directly from engagement in artistic practice. This approach is particularly relevant to Lanna traditional performing arts, which are intimately woven into local rituals and daily life. A core tenet of this methodology is that artistic practice itself generates unique forms of knowledge, distinct from those produced by conventional scientific

methods (Borgdorff, 2012; Mäkelä, 2007). As Pornrat Damrhung (2020) articulates, "Performance research is a broad and fairly new set of approaches for doing artistic research in the field of performance. … It seeks to produce 'embodied' and 'felt knowledge' through those performance practices" (p. 376). This perspective underscores how artistic works can function as instruments for creating knowledge that is physically and emotionally tangible, leading to deeper, more personal understanding (Klein, 2017).

This aligns with Robin Nelson's (2013) concept of Practice-as-Research, where the creative process is not merely a means to an end but a legitimate mode of inquiry, yielding novel insights. Arlander et al. (2018) further support this, viewing performance as a medium for artistic research that explores lived experiences and generates understanding through sensory and experiential engagement. The methodologies employed in this study—the creation and analysis of two distinct Lanna performance pieces—exemplify this practice-led approach, producing knowledge directly through the act of artistic creation and its subsequent analysis.

Lanna Cultural Ecosystems and Traditional Performance: Interwoven Heritage

The concept of cultural ecology, first advanced by Julian Steward (1955), offers a fundamental framework for understanding the intricate relationships between human societies, their cultures, and their natural environments. In Northern Thailand, particularly among the Lanna people, this ecological perspective is vividly reflected in their traditional performing arts. Ritual-based Lanna performances, such as *Fawn Phi Mod Phi Meng*—a ceremonial dance used to dispel misfortune and restore spiritual balance—transcend aesthetic expression. They are deeply embedded in cosmological beliefs and serve as vital components of community life, intertwining the spiritual and ecological dimensions of culture (Damrhung, 2020).

These dances often reflect the community's profound relationship with nature and unseen spiritual forces believed to inhabit forests, mountains, and rivers. In this way, traditional Lanna performance functions as a cultural repository, preserving local wisdom, belief systems, and historical experiences related to natural resources. Through their embodied symbolism and ritual function, performances like *Fawn Phi Mod Phi Meng* contribute to maintaining ecological awareness and spiritual resilience within the cultural-ecological landscape. This intrinsic connection highlights the significant potential of Lanna performing arts to articulate and strengthen messages of natural conservation.

Art as Environmental Communication: Engaging Beyond Data

In an era defined by urgent environmental crises, as highlighted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023), art's role in fostering public awareness and action has become increasingly vital. Art uniquely transcends purely scientific data or policy directives by engaging audiences on an emotional and experiential level, translating complex ecological issues into relatable human narratives and aesthetics. Suzi Gablik (1991) eloquently argues that art possesses transformative power, moving beyond mere aesthetic contemplation to actively engage with societal challenges and promote ethical responsibility towards the environment.

Performing arts, in particular, offer a potent means for environmental communication. Their embodied nature—even when adapted for digital platforms—can create a profound sense of presence and connection, inviting audiences to reflect deeply on their relationship with the natural world. By weaving environmental themes into culturally resonant expressions, art can bypass intellectual barriers and evoke empathy, inspiring critical thinking and encouraging active participation in conservation efforts. This approach aims to cultivate a

deeper understanding and appreciation for ecological issues that might be overlooked through conventional forms of communication.

Technology and Digital Media in Arts Dissemination: New Horizons, New Challenges

The advent of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped the landscape of artistic creation, dissemination, and reception, opening unprecedented avenues for performing arts to reach wider audiences. Lev Manovich (2001) posits that new media introduce fundamental changes in artistic forms, characterized by modularity, variability, and the convergence of different media types. This digital transformation enables the adaptation of live performances into various digital formats, facilitating their global reach and accessibility beyond traditional physical venues.

Furthermore, Marshall McLuhan's (1964) seminal concept, "the medium is the message," asserts that the form of media itself fundamentally influences how content is perceived and impacts society. In the context of Lanna performing arts and environmental conservation, digital platforms are not merely passive conduits; they actively shape the message's delivery and reception. While offering unprecedented reach and accessibility, digital dissemination also prompts critical questions about the depth of audience engagement, the capacity for "felt knowledge" to be generated in a virtual space, and whether online exposure alone suffices to instigate tangible social and behavioral change towards conservation. This study thus explores both the expanded possibilities and inherent challenges presented by digital media in transforming Lanna ecological performances into effective tools for public awareness.

Sacred Ecology and Hybrid Governance: Ritual, Community Rules, and Technology in Lanna Resource Management

This study highlights two complementary modes of ecological knowledge and resource governance within Lanna culture. The first case—centered on forest ordination ceremonies—reflects sacred ecology. These rituals symbolically ordain trees as monks, transforming the forest into a spiritually protected space. Rooted in Buddhist belief, this cultural strategy instills reverence and fear, thereby discouraging logging through moral authority and communal participation.

The second case from Ban Ko illustrates a hybrid system of ecological knowledge and governance. It combines traditional values with modern technologies—such as solar panels, artesian wells, and sustainable agriculture—and is reinforced by local community rules and national environmental law. Each village in the watershed network establishes its own codes of conduct regarding forest and water usage, creating a decentralized but coordinated structure of ecological stewardship. This model exemplifies how ancestral wisdom can coexist with innovation, resulting in a dynamic, adaptive system that addresses environmental challenges through both cultural continuity and institutional regulation.

Together, these cases broaden the framework of Traditional Ecological Knowledge by illustrating how sacred beliefs, community-based rules, and formal legal mechanisms can be integrated into a sustainable and culturally resonant form of natural resource management in the digital era.

Methodological Approach and Analytical Framework

This article adopts a qualitative and comparative analytical framework, synthesizing insights derived from two independent but thematically interconnected creative research projects. These include:

1. *The Creation of Contemporary Performing Arts Based on Forest Ordination Derived from Lanna's Belief*, which explores how spiritual forest ordination ceremonies can be reinterpreted as contemporary performance to promote ecological awareness; and
2. *The Wisdom Intelligence and Creativity in Watershed Management of Lanna Community: The Media Presentation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts*, which investigates how traditional community-based water management practices can be communicated through contemporary media and performing arts.

Each project employed distinct yet complementary methodologies. The first project was grounded in cultural beliefs and rituals, emphasizing embodied spiritual narratives through performance. The second project incorporated ethnographic methods—such as interviews, direct observation, and participatory engagement with community members—to document local ecological knowledge and its adaptation to contemporary practices. All community interactions in the second project were conducted with informed consent, adherence to data protection principles, and formal ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Chiang Mai University, ensuring that participants' rights, privacy, and dignity were fully respected.

This article does not reproduce the two projects in full, but rather analyzes them as case studies through the lens of practice-led research, cultural ecology, and artistic research. The aim is to examine how embodied knowledge and indigenous wisdom are generated, interpreted, and disseminated through Lanna performing arts in the digital age. This comparative synthesis offers new insights into how traditional and contemporary practices can coexist as tools for environmental education and cultural conservation.

The Creative Process: From Fieldwork to Artistic Production

This section outlines the creative processes behind the two performance-based research projects that form the core of this study. Each work followed a distinct but complementary trajectory, comprising three phases: pre-production, production, and post-production. These stages not only shaped the artistic outcomes but also served as epistemic spaces for generating embodied, cultural, and ecological knowledge.

Spirit of the Forest: A Non-Verbal Exploration of Sacred Ecology

Pre-Production:

This performance was conceptually grounded in traditional Lanna forest ordination rituals of Northern Thailand. The research process began with a literature review focused on spiritual ecology, animist beliefs, and ceremonial practices related to forest sanctification. These textual insights were supported by field visits to actual community forests within the Ban Pong Development Project area. Drawing on these sources, the researcher developed a five-scene performance that portrays the destruction of the forest, its spiritual consequences, and a ritual journey toward reconciliation and renewal. The choreography and dramatic structure were shaped through observation of the natural surroundings and adapted from traditional Lanna movement vocabularies to express emotional and symbolic layers of meaning.

Production:

The artistic process took place in a real forest setting under the Ban Pong Development Project. The choreography was created collaboratively, drawing on local dance idioms and natural environmental cues. Rehearsals were conducted on-site to immerse the performers in the ecological context. The performance was then recorded on video, with sound design integrating live instruments and ambient forest acoustics. This phase also included script refinement, staging decisions, and visual planning for later dissemination.

Post-Production:

The recorded performance was edited to emphasize the central message of the "living forest," highlighting both its spiritual essence and the consequences of deforestation. The video was then published on YouTube to reach a broader audience. Viewer feedback was gathered through brief interviews and questionnaires to assess how effectively the non-verbal performance conveyed ecological messages.



Figure 1. A ritual-inspired Lanna dance performed in front of the Reclining Buddha at Wat Doi Thaen Phra Phaluang, illustrating the spiritual connection between performer and sacred landscape.
Source: Author (Work 1)

Voices of Ban Ko: Community Knowledge in Performance

Pre-Production:

This second creative work was developed through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ban Ko village, Lamphun Province. The researcher engaged in in-depth interviews with local villagers and community leaders to document perspectives on water management practices, forest usage, and oral histories related to natural resource governance. These qualitative insights were analyzed and synthesized into a script structure and a newly composed *phleng so* (Lanna poetic song), reflecting local ecological wisdom in both form and content.

Production:

The performance was staged and filmed at real community locations such as Chammathewi Shrine, reservoirs, and communal halls. Drawing from traditional Lanna dance vocabularies, the choreography was interwoven with live narration, *phleng so*, and symbolic gestures derived from everyday rural practices. Local voices and ambient sounds were recorded and integrated into the performance, with sound design emphasizing the lived experience and agency of the community as co-creators of the work.

Post-Production:

The final video was constructed through the layering of real-time footage, environmental soundscapes, and digital illustrations of watershed systems, with careful editing to preserve the authenticity and rhythm of the original performance. Dissemination took place via community screenings and online platforms, encouraging dialogue around

environmental sustainability. Informal feedback was collected to evaluate how effectively the work communicated local knowledge and resonated with audiences inside and outside the community.



Figure 2. A Lanna dancer performing a gesture of reverence in front of the statue of Queen Chammathewi at Chammathewi Shrine, Ban Ko. The performance reflects the intertwining of ritual, memory, and ecological storytelling.
Source: Author (Work 2)

Together, these processes reflect how Lanna performing arts, as a form of community-rooted traditional expression grounded in specific cultural and geographic contexts, can serve as an embodied, participatory research method. This work demonstrates that when adapted through creative media, traditional Lanna performance can articulate environmental concerns and amplify community voices in powerful and meaningful ways.

Resulte and Discussion

The two creative works discussed in this article share a common objective: to communicate messages of environmental conservation through Lanna performing arts. While unified in purpose, they differ significantly in their modes of presentation, narrative content, and cultural emphasis. A comparative analysis reveals three core dimensions that frame these differences: (1) Inspiration and cultural context, (2) Artistic presentation and form, and (3) Knowledge generated through the creative process.

Inspiration and Cultural Context

The first creative work, *The Creation of Contemporary Performing Arts Based on Forest Ordination Derived from Lanna's Belief to Promote Forest Conservation*, is inspired by the Lanna forest ordination ceremony, a culturally embedded strategy that invokes sacred beliefs—such as those in forest spirits, water spirits, and mountain deities—as protective forces for forests and the natural environment. These belief systems reflect a worldview that regards the forest as a living entity with spiritual agency and deserving of reverence. The performance was created to communicate this profound spiritual relationship between humans and nature, suggesting that such cosmological views continue to hold power in raising environmental awareness in contemporary society.



Figure 3. Sacred offerings arranged by the artist as part of a forest ordination-inspired performance, symbolizing Lanna beliefs in the spiritual power of nature.
Source: Author (Work 1)

In contrast, the second creative work, *The Wisdom, Intelligence, and Creativity in Watershed Management of Lanna Community: The Media Presentation of Contemporary Lanna Performing Arts*, explores how the Ban Ko community manages its watershed and forest resources. It highlights local ecological wisdom that is harmoniously integrated with structured community management systems and modern technologies—such as solar panels, water pipelines, and groundwater wells. This work emphasizes the notion of "coexistence" between humans and nature as a lived social reality, where nature is not separate from human life but embedded within it, forming the basis for a sustainable way of living.

Artistic Presentation: Lanna Performing Arts as a Language of Storytelling

Both creative works employ Lanna performing arts as a central tool for communicating relationships between humans and nature. While the two adopt different modes of storytelling, they share the core belief that *traditional Lanna performance does not need to be altered to become contemporary*. Instead, contemporaneity arises through new configurations that connect traditional forms with present-day concerns—without diminishing their cultural identity. This reflects the idea that Lanna performing arts function as a powerful cultural language, capable of conveying meaning through lived, embodied experience.

The first work relies on non-verbal expression—bodily movement and the sound of traditional string instruments such as *sueng*, *salaw*, and *pin pia*. There is no spoken dialogue or narration. Instead, the piece unfolds through rhythm, gesture, and carefully constructed moments of silence. Here, silence is not simply the absence of sound but an intentional space that allows ambient natural sounds—like wind, rustling leaves, or footsteps—to become part of the storytelling.

This approach invites the audience into a deeper state of sensory awareness. It encourages a kind of "inner listening" that connects with the spirit of the forest and allows room for personal interpretation. It also reflects a belief in *embodied and spiritual knowledge*: the idea that understanding can arise not only through words or logic, but through sound, movement, atmosphere, and shared presence with nature.

The second work uses a more layered narrative structure. It combines newly composed *phleng so*, interview excerpts, staged performances, and footage of real community locations. The lyrics of the *phleng so* were created using actual voices and stories from Ban Ko villagers, giving the songs two important roles: (1) narrating local experiences of water

and forest management, and (2) providing a dignified platform for community voices to speak within an artistic framework.



Figure 4. A contemporary Lanna dance performed at Kaeng Ko, Lamphun, portraying the fluid movement of water as metaphor for sustainable community life.
Source: Author (Work 2)

This turns the piece into more than a performance—it becomes a kind of *artistic documentary* that bridges traditional aesthetics with contemporary reality. The use of real settings—shrines, reservoirs, meeting halls, forest streams—adds emotional and cultural depth, functioning as *cultural documentation* rooted in lived space and memory.

While the two works differ in form—one relying on body, sound, and silence; the other on spoken language, real-life testimony, and poetic song—they both affirm that traditional Lanna performance can act as a living language. Rather than decorating content, folk performance becomes a *knowledge-making process*, communicating through movement, rhythm, silence, and memory embedded in local culture.

Knowledge Generated through the Creative Process of Lanna Performing Arts

These two creative works not only address environmental themes, but also open new spaces for generating knowledge that is cultural, spiritual, and rooted in human-nature relations. Anchored in the framework of *art as a knowledge-making process*, both pieces demonstrate how artistic practice can give rise to ways of knowing that are embodied, situated, and meaningful to local contexts.

Lanna Performing Arts: An Alternative Language of Nature

The use of Lanna performing arts—including dance (*fon*), poetic chanting (*phleng so*), and traditional folk music—in both works reveals that traditional forms are not merely *tools* for communicating nature. Rather, they act as a *language of nature* itself, deeply embedded in local beliefs, lifeways, and value systems. The artists do not attempt to modernize these forms superficially, but instead reframe them in ways that bring forth their inherent contemporary relevance.

The First Work: Silence, Belief, and the Spirit of the Forest The first piece uses Lanna string instruments such as *sueng* and *salaw*, alongside bodily movement and *abstract silence*, to convey beliefs about forest spirits (*phi pa*) and the forest ordination ritual—entirely without spoken dialogue or narration. The audience engages with the work through what might be called *spiritual sensing*—an intuitive form of experience that activates imagination and deep awareness of the forest's spiritual dimension. Here, art

functions as a non-verbal dialogue between humans and nature, operating beyond the bounds of language and logic.

The Second Work: Phleng So and the Voice of the Community In the second work, *phleng so* is not merely an artistic embellishment but a newly composed poetic song based on real-life knowledge from the Ban Ko community. While it follows the traditional structure of *phleng so*, the lyrics are based on interviews and community narratives, referencing figures like Queen Chammathewi, village names, and watershed management in the Ping River Basin. This creative act demonstrates the adaptability of traditional art to new contexts, while retaining its original identity. More significantly, it offers a way for the community to *reclaim its voice*—to become authors of their own narrative through a familiar and culturally resonant form. *Phleng so*, in this sense, is both an artistic language and a vessel for *local knowledge*, capable of transmitting cultural memory in ways that are emotionally powerful, accessible, and true to community identity.

Practice-Based Knowledge

The creative processes behind both works illustrate that knowledge is not produced solely through theoretical analysis. It can also emerge from hands-on, embodied engagement—particularly in artistic contexts where creation involves direct interaction with people, place, and culture. Rehearsing dances in actual forest spaces, composing *phleng so* from oral interviews, and designing performances in harmony with existing landscapes are all lived experiences that generate learning through rhythm, sound, sensation, and immersion. Art, in this framework, becomes a *learning space*—where body, emotion, and spirit converge with ecological awareness and local storytelling. This aligns with the idea of *art as a generative form of knowledge*, not only reflecting what has been observed, but also creating new, evolving ways of understanding that emerge in the moment of creation and continue to evolve with each performance and each viewer.



Figure 5. Ms. Laksada Dongkamphu, Head of Water Resource Division, shares local insights into watershed practices during an interview conducted in Ban Ko.
Source: Author (Work 2)

Real Places as Spaces of Meaning: When Site Becomes a Co-Narrator

One shared feature of both works is the use of *real locations* not merely as scenic backdrops, but as active *co-narrators*—places imbued with physical, historical, spiritual, and emotional significance.



Figure 6. Community engagement sessions in Ban Ko where local residents shared water and forest management knowledge. These participatory activities informed the performance content and structure.
Source: Author (Work 2)

In the first work, the performance takes place in the forest of the Ban Pong Development Project at Maejo University—a site where actual forest ordination rituals were once held. Within this space, the movements, traditional string music, and intentional silence transform the forest into a character in its own right—one that speaks of nature's spirit in profound and embodied ways.



Figure 7. A Lanna dance and music performance staged in a burnt forest area, using bodily movement as a silent response to environmental destruction.
Source: Author (Work 1)

In the second work, locations across Ban Ko, Lamphun—including shrines, reservoirs, and village meeting halls—were selected for their functional and symbolic roles in local water management. The integration of *phleng so* and the voices of local residents situates the performance within the lived reality of the community, making it not just representative, but deeply connected.



Figure 8. A traditional Lanna dance performed in front of a community water service point in Ban Ko, Lamphun. The image highlights the intersection of cultural expression and everyday resource management practices.
Source: Author (Work 2)

These two cases suggest that real places are not passive containers for art, but *spaces of meaning* that bring life to the story in ways that academic information alone cannot. In this light, performing arts do not merely perform *in* a place—they perform *with* the place, co-creating a tangible dialogue between humans, nature, and culture. Together, these insights affirm the value of Lanna performing arts not only as cultural expression but as a dynamic framework for ecological storytelling, rooted in lived experience.

Conclusion

This article has presented a comparative analysis of two creative works that utilize Lanna performing arts as a medium for conveying concepts of natural resource conservation in contemporary contexts. The analysis reveals that, while the two works differ in narrative strategies—in terms of inspiration, presentation methods, and artistic techniques—they share a common belief: that traditional Lanna performing arts possess the potential to function as a powerful "language" for communicating contemporary themes, without requiring a transformation that compromises their cultural identity.

The first work employs bodily expression, traditional folk music, and abstract silence to explore the spiritual essence of the forest and beliefs surrounding forest ordination rituals. In contrast, the second work uses newly composed *phleng so*, informed by community-based data, interviews, and performances staged in real locations, to narrate the story of water resource management in Ban Ko village. Together, the two works demonstrate that performance is not merely a narrative medium but a *learning space*—one that weaves together body, emotion, spirit, and cultural context.

The study also shows that artistic creation is not only an act of producing work, but a *knowledge-making process*—emerging through direct practice, community engagement, and lived experience. Particularly through the use of real locations, these performances transform *place* into a co-narrator—infused with meaning, memory, and emotional presence—deepening the viewer's connection to the story.

Furthermore, the research raises a critical question about digital dissemination: is online presentation alone sufficient to generate social impact and raise environmental awareness? While this question remains open, what is evident throughout the creative process

is that when Lanna performing arts are integrated with community wisdom and digital technology, they can open new perceptual spaces—accessible both physically and spiritually.

In conclusion, this article does not seek to offer definitive answers, but rather to propose *possibilities*. It suggests that performing arts can serve as sustainable cultural tools—particularly when they are developed in ways that connect meaningfully with communities, audiences, and the shifting contexts of the digital age.

Suggestions

While this study highlights the potential of Lanna performing arts to communicate ecological and cultural themes in profound and resonant ways, several areas remain open for further development. One key direction involves gathering additional data on the impact of these works on audiences and communities, which could help assess the artistic and social value of the performances in more empirical and multidimensional terms.

Another important avenue is the continued development of diverse digital media formats that respond to contemporary contexts—such as interactive or immersive technologies (e.g., VR/AR). These formats may expand the perceptual space of the audience, enhancing both access and engagement across broader platforms.

Furthermore, designing long-term, participatory learning processes in collaboration with communities may offer new roles for traditional performing arts—not only as communicative forms, but as active agents in the revitalization, development, and sustainable preservation of local knowledge systems.

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