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Abstract:

This paper focuses on preserving Thai cultural heritage in the form of picture books. Children's reading situation and children's book market in Thailand were introduced briefly for readers to understand the present reading environment in Thailand. Children's picture book development was also mentioned as an introduction to the author's main theme. The Thai ways of life in the country side where children could learn about their peers' everyday life in the rice fields was displayed on the author's picture book "Paengram in the Paddy Fields". Life in the salt fields was compiled on the second picture book of Paengram series: "Paengram in the Salt Fields". The third picture book of this series was "Paengram in the Orchard". Moreover, a Thai traditional nursery rhyme "Moon O Moon" was made into a picture book for children aiming at preserving this children's song and helping parents to get their children to go to sleep. The author explained the reason why and how these picture books for children were made including how they used picture books for children in Thailand.

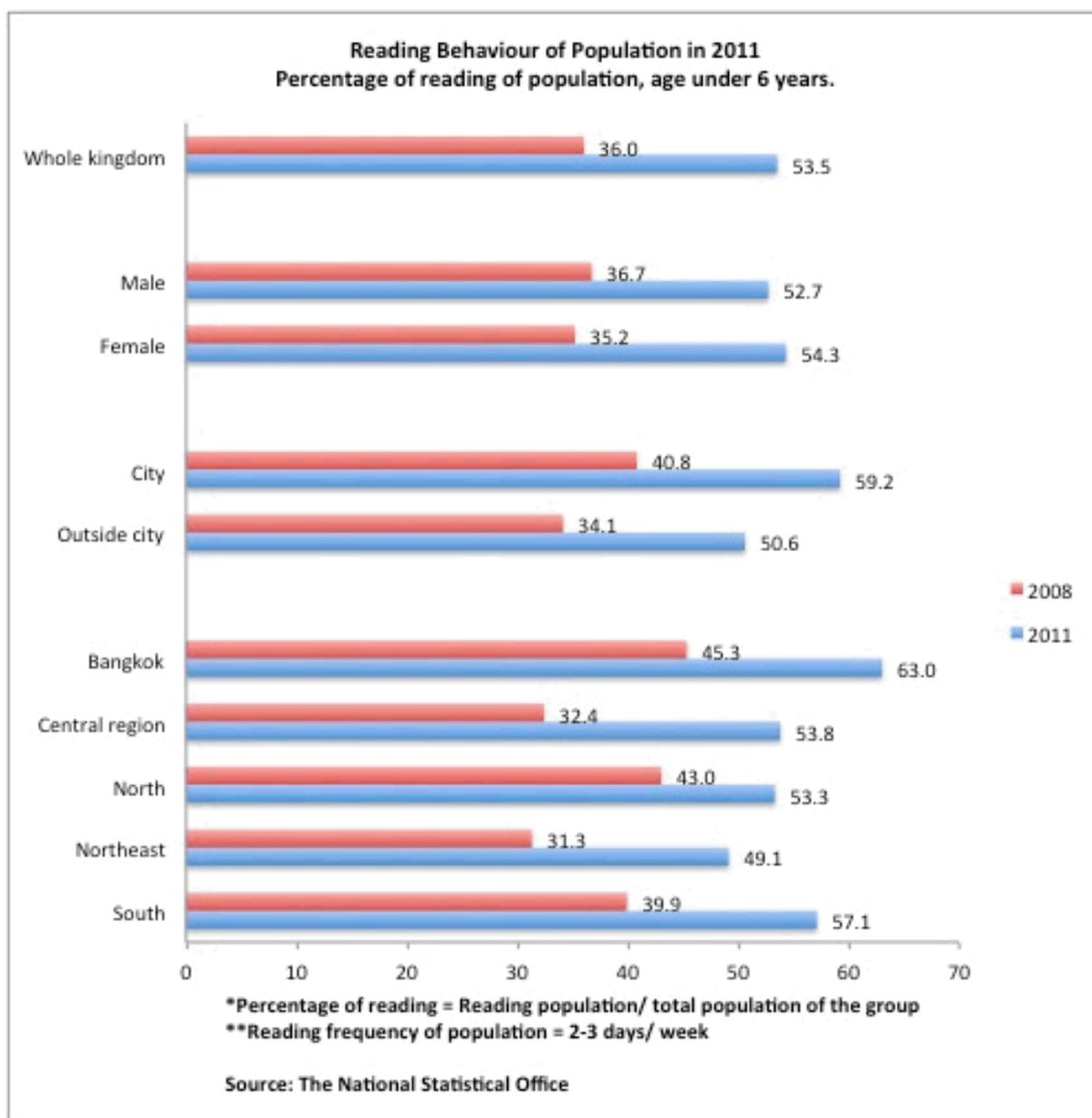
Keywords: children's reading, picture books, cultural heritage, Thai ways of life, nursery rhyme.

1 CHILDREN'S READING SITUATION IN THAILAND

The 2010 survey by The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (PUBAT: www.pubat.or.th) showed that Thais on average read only 5 books per year, compared with Malaysian's 40 books, Singaporean's 45 books and Japanese's 50 books per year. PUBAT's previous survey in 2005 indicated that Thais read just 2 books a year on average.

The National Statistical Office (<http://web.nso.go.th>) performed a reading survey from May – June 2011 on 53,000 households and found out an important issue that 53.5 per cent of Thai children under 6 years old read or were read books by adults. This figure jumped from its previous survey in 2008 with the same group's reading percentage at 36.0.

This was due to concerted efforts among private and public sectors to promote reading in Thailand. The Thai Section of IBBY (ThaiBBY: www.thaibby.in.th) had also actively organized various programs on reading promotion including Bookstart Project.



2 CHILDREN'S BOOK MARKET IN THAILAND

The overall Thai publishing market in 2011 was valued at 21.5 billion baht (approximately 700 million US dollars). The figure was 21 billion baht in 2010 and 19.2 billion baht in 2009. Children's book market was estimated at 25-30 per cent of the whole market valued at 6 billion baht (200 million US dollars) in 2011.

At present, there are 710 publishers in Thailand of which 567 publishers are members of The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand and 320 of the publishers are small-scale.

The Thai Publishing Industry	2008	2009	2010
No. of Publishers (only PUBAT members)	476	517	567
No. of New Titles	13,348	13,624	15,086
No. of Titles/day	36.6	37.3	41.3
No. of Bookstores	2,483	2,943	3,333
Book Publishing Revenue (US\$ Mil.)	620	640	700

Rank	Bestselling Category
1	Fiction
2	Children's Books
3	Study/ Exam Guide
4	Educational Comics
5	General

Source: The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (PUBAT), 2011

3 CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND

Before 1993, children's books in Thailand were mostly story books and folktales for children to read by themselves. Parents believed that reading should be taught at school and done by school teachers.

In 1993, Amarin Printing and Publishing Public Company set up Amarin Children's Book (Praw Puan Dek). The publisher was the pioneer to bring good picture books for children from around the world and published the Thai version for Thai children.

The publishing had to go along with the promotion of reading picture books for toddlers and kindergarten kids. It took a few years before the Thai public gradually understood how important it was to read for children and good picture books were essential for small kids. The publication of children's picture books by Thai authors and illustrators were also gradually developed.

There are various kinds of picture books to be created for Thai children of different ages: baby books, children's songs, rhythm and rhyme, story books, folktales, fiction, non-fiction and etc.

4 PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE FORM OF PICTURE BOOKS

Paengram in the Paddy Fields แป้งรำทำนา



When we plan to produce a picture book, usually we will start looking for a good story, then we will look for a suitable illustrator to draw pictures for the story.

However, “Paengram Tham Na” (Paengram in the Paddy Fields) started from the passion of an illustrator who wanted to do a picture book for children.

Benjamas Kamboonmee, a primary school teacher, had been learning to draw pictures by herself. She taught arts to her pupils and did her part time job as an illustrator for a woman's magazine.

Benjamas told me that she would like very much to illustrate a picture book for young children. After studying her portfolios, I found that her landscape pictures were outstanding. I thought she could draw pictures for stories set in the country, especially from her hometown.

We went to Chainat Province (219 km North of Bangkok) by bus. Chainat was her hometown and famous for traditional rice growing. She took me to the rice farms where she used to enjoy playing with her friends in her childhood. They caught fish, mice and sometimes snakes. They playfully stole fruits from the neighbour's gardens. Thai children in the country usually had this forbidden experience. Because there were plenty of fruits everywhere, children could enjoy picking up fruits from other people's orchard. They would be scolded when they got caught but children knew very well that adults just wanted to express their power. No one would be worried about a few fruits.

Children loved playing on the rice straw mountain during harvest time. They were also fond of the rice cake made by villagers during the festival at the village temple.

Unfortunately, these ways of life in the country of Thailand are fading rapidly. Thai children nowadays are glued to the television and games or loaded with homework from school. We can see less and less children playing in the rice fields.

Paengram in the Paddy Fields displayed the pictures and the feelings of children enjoying life in the nature, preserving the Thai cultural and professional heritage.

Paengram in the Salt Fields แป้งร่ำทำนาเกลือ



In 2008, *Benjamas* and I planned to do another *Paengram Series*. This time I took *Benjamas* to my hometown in Petchburi Province (123 km South of Bangkok). We went to Banlam District which was one of the largest salt fields in Thailand with the area of 4,000 acres. There were also many “Bird Condominiums” built for keeping swallows. The villagers earned a lot from the sales of bird's nests.

The natural way of salt production from sea water in the salt fields was interesting for children and adults as well. We did not know about “Fleur de Sel” until we visited the salt fields in Petchburi.

There was also an abundance of a particular green vegetable called “Pak Chakram” (Sueda maritime) on the salt field dykes. This salty vegetable could be cooked deliciously with crab curry or cockle curry. The dish is a famous specialty of this area. Moreover, there were plenty of “Poo-sa-mae”(Field crab) which could be blended with “Som Tam” (Papaya Salad), one of the most favourite dishes among Thai people and foreigners,too. Children would enjoy playing in the salt fields and eating delicious dishes from the salt fields and from the sea.

Salt fields are shrinking due to expanding industrialization in the area. Salt is a very cheap product in Thailand while labour is scarce and the wages are soaring. Displaying the salt fields in picture books may urge their preservation.

Paengram in the Orchard แป้งรำทำสวน



The third picture book of “*Paengram Series*” was planned in 2011. We went to my mother’s orchard in Chantaburi Province (245 km East of Bangkok). This time children would learn about various kinds of fruits and trees. Jackfruit, Rambutan, Mafai (Ramiflora), Langsat, Longong (Sweet Langsat), Mangosteen, Sala, Rakam (Salacca wallichiana) and many more kinds of fruits and vegetables were grown in the orchard. Children would enjoy helping and eating fresh juicy delicious fruits directly picked from the trees.

We did not know before that the dogs favourite fruit in the orchard were durians. It was very funny when we saw a dog cleverly peeling durian’s thorny shells.

Paengram (Perfumed powder-a Thai nickname) will continue to learn Thai professions and lifestyles with her childhood friends to record the details on picture books before some of them faded away with modernization.

Goodnight Moon นอนละนะ พระจันทร์



A few years after we started publishing picture books, a mother came to me and asked “Please produce a picture book which can help children to go to sleep, too. Nowadays, I have to read so many books during bedtime and my children hardly go to sleep.”

I studied some western picture books of this category, for example: *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown, pictures by Clement Hurd, *Bedtime for Frances* by Russell Hoban, pictures by Garth Williams and *A Child’s Good Night Book* by Margaret Wise Brown, pictures by Jean Charlot.

Goodnight Moon was so impressive and inspiring. I thought of a traditional Thai popular children’s song “*Chan Eui Chan Chao*” (*Moon O Moon*). We used to play and sing the song with children when we saw the moon in the sky. I tried to find a way to make this children’s song with rhythm and rhyme into a picture book which will help children to go to sleep.

จันทร์เอ๋ยจันทร์เจ้า

Moon O Moon

ขอข้าวขอแกง

I beg for rice and curry

ขอแหวนทองแดง

I beg for a copper ring

ผูกมือน้องข้า

To tie to my brother’s hand

ขอช้างขอม้า

I beg for an elephant and a horse

ให้น้องขี่

For my brother to ride

ขอเก้าอี้	I beg for a chair
ให้น้องขำนั่ง	For my brother to sit on
ขอเตียงตั้ง	I beg for a bed
ให้น้องขำนอน	For my brother to sleep in
ขอละคร	I beg for a play
ให้น้องขำดู	For my brother to see
ขอยายชู	I beg for Granny Choo
เลี้ยงน้องขำเถิด	To take care of my brother
ขอยายเก็ด	I beg for Granny Gerd
เลี้ยงตัวขำเอง	To take care of me too.

After singing the song, the child began to say goodnight to each of them and followed by goodnight moon.

Rice and Curry, I will go to Sleep	Goodnight Moon
Copper Ring, I will go to sleep	Goodnight Moon
Elephant and Horse, I will go to sleep	Goodnight Moon
Chair and Bed, I will go to sleep	Goodnight Moon
O my Play, I will go to sleep	Goodnight Moon
Granny Choo and Granny Gerd, I will go to sleep	Goodnight Moon
Moon O Moon, I will go to Sleep	Goodnight Moon

This book was made into an audio book by TKpark and read by ThaiBBY's President, Khunying Kasama Varavan. It was also uploaded by youtube for foreigners to learn Thai Language.

5 HOW PICTURE BOOKS ARE USED IN THAILAND

According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), data from the government and non-government organizations showed that only 44 per cent of households in Thailand have more than three children’s books, while only 54 per cent of fathers in Thailand participate in activities with their children. Increasing children’s picture books in the households will also increase Thai fathers’ role with their kids.

ThaiBBY has put its effort on the Bookstart Project, giving Bookstart bags with two baby books to families in the project areas every year. One of the books given is “Play with Daddy” with the intention to increase Thai father’s participation in reading and playing with their children.

Picture books are used more and more in “Children Development Centers”(CDC) which are run by local governments taking care of children before primary school. Unfortunately, only 73 per cent of children attended CDC in 2008, while only 34 per cent of 8,276 CDC in Thailand met the government minimum standard.

Private and government kindergartens are the leader of picture book users. Kindergartens play an important role to promote reading amongst children by lending picture books to their homes and asking their parents to read for their kids.

There are some Thai non-government organizations working on reading promotion through picture books and children’s libraries. The prominent ones are SCG Foundation, Tai Wisdom Association and the Rotary Clubs. These organizations are working closely with ThaiBBY.

Thailand Knowledge Park (TK park) is a government organization established as a living library aiming at reading promotion to children, teenagers and adults. TK park’s programs cover a broad range of creative and cultural activities including the preservation of cultural heritage.



SCG Foundation Tai Wisdom Association



TK park



ThaiBBY

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