

Klongtoey D-Jung

A Case Study of Music & Art Management

THAILAND



Nurturing “Intermediaries” through Music and Arts Management:

A Case Study of Klongtoey D-Jung

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1. Introduction

This study reports on the case of Klongtoey D-Jung (hereafter “KTD”), a group organizing a community music movement in the Khlong Toei district, the largest slum in Bangkok, from the perspective of arts management.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted a total of four times, each lasting for about two hours, from February to April 2021. In addition, to supplement the semi-structured interviews, questions were asked as needed via social media. The interviewees were Siriporn Pomwong, the leader of KTD and co-author of this paper, Staff Member B, and two child participants (C and D). Since none of the interviewees spoke English well, Paritta-anong Tawanwiwattanagul, who worked as a coordinator for Djung Space Network, stepped in as an interpreter.

1–2. Overview of the Khlong Toei District

Khlong Toei, one of the fifty administrative districts in Bangkok, is the largest slum area in the city. Since the early twentieth century, people from northeastern Thailand have moved into Khlong Toei and “formed the area along with the progress of the construction of the Khlong Toei Port along the Chao Phraya River” (Yasuhiro Hitomi: 2013: 101). The administrative district covers an area of 8,121 rai, of which 2,357 rai, or about 29%, is owned by the Port Authority of the Ministry of Transport, which operates the Port of Bangkok (Tatsuya Hata: 2014); the slum dwellers occupy and live on land owned by the Port Authority.

There are 26 slums in the Khlong Toei district and four communities in the slums where KTD operates. There are 1,444 households with 5,013 people, of whom 1,207 are children.

The main social issues in Khlong Toei are housing, poverty, education, drug abuse, and domestic violence. In particular, the drug problem is extremely serious, with 98% of families involved in the drug market. Education is also a deep-rooted problem: while 50% of the children attend junior high school, only 2% make it to high school or college. The slums in Khlong Toei are already in the second and third generation, creating a negative cycle. For this reason, the number of NGOs in Khlong Toei is the largest in Thailand.

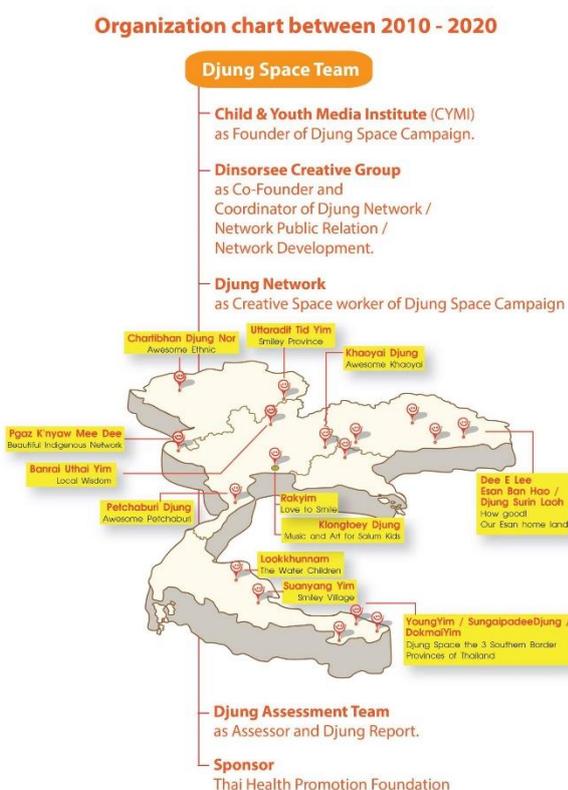
2. Case Studies

2-1. KTD's Management Methods and Projects

KTD, a non-governmental organization (NGO) operating in the district of Khlong Toei, is managed by Music Sharing, which was established in 2012. Music Sharing was launched in 2013 by Pomwong, a qualified nurse, as an activity to donate musical instruments. Following its success, KTD was founded and affiliated with Djung Space Network¹ in 2015 (Figure 1).

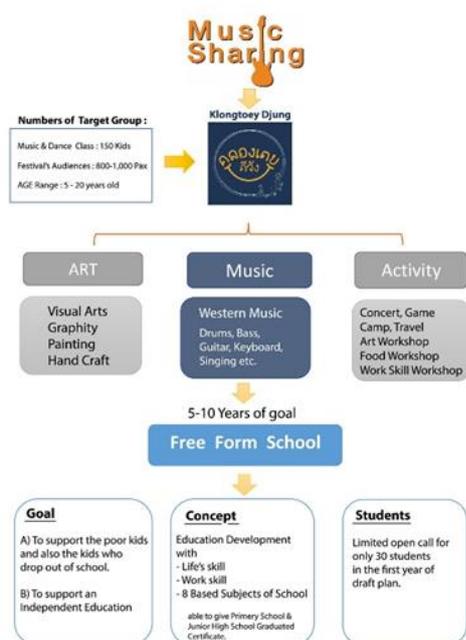
While governmental and non-governmental organizations are engaged in the activities of KTD (Figures 2 and 3), the relationship of the group with the Port Authority of Thailand, 43 communities in the Khlong Toei district, and other NGOs is particularly important.

The group raises funds for its operations mainly from the following four sources. The first is an annual grant from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, which accounts for 50% of the operating funds. The second is CSR from three companies (Allianz Ayudhya of Germany; Loxiley, a banking and cargo company; and Tigerplast, a large Thai company) that became interested in the group following the success of Music Sharing. They fund the group's activities on



a project-by-project basis, accounting for 30% of the total operating funds. The third source is KTD's fan club and the fan clubs of Korean idol groups, which account for 15% of the operating funds. The fourth is crowdfunding, which accounts for

¹ Bhunghthini Djung is a network of creative spaces for children that was launched in 2010 and, as of 2021, has 16 member organizations. Each organization aims to “help young people discover and understand good things about their community through its activities and to communicate them within and outside the community to raise awareness of its positive aspects as a result”.



the remaining 15% and is used to raise donations for projects. Personnel costs are covered jointly by Music Sharing and KTD.

Currently, KTD mainly provides music workshops, and also organizes art workshops and related social activities. As a new project, KTD also plans to open a free school for slum children (capacity: 30 students). As of April 2021, the pilot project has already started and KTD awaits government approval for the establishment of the free school.

These projects are usually evaluated in the following four ways.

- 1) Quantitative survey by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation
- 2) Peer review within the Bhunghthini Djung network, measuring not only organizational development but also qualitative aspects, including the growth of children
- 3) Request for the engagement of volunteer consultants to investigate relatively macro issues such as long-term changes, employment status, and household economics in the community
- 4) Collaboration with international organizations such as UNICEF to evaluate the psychological state of children

KTD experiments with various networks and methods in its project evaluation alone. The next section focuses on the organization and effectiveness of KTD's main project, the music workshop.

2-2. Overview of the Music Workshop

The music workshop began in 2012. The purpose of this workshop is twofold. First, to improve musical skills; KTD, in collaboration with volunteer music instructors, encourages participants to learn how to play popular music instruments. The group also seeks to prepare children to become professional musicians in the future.

Second, to reinforce life skills through music. Khlong Toei is characterized by

problems of violence, and thus children are likely to understand violence as a means of communication. It is also difficult for children to develop self-esteem through violence. This is why it is important to use music to help them improve their mental health, learn peaceful communication skills that do not involve violence, and develop social skills such as listening to the voices and opinions of others.

KTD currently consists of six full-time staff members and about 20 volunteers. The volunteers come from various backgrounds and were recruited from the public. Incidentally, volunteer development at KTD contributes to society in two main ways.

The first is the formation of volunteers' personalities. Volunteers do not have experience in or knowledge of the Khlong Toei district or the situation of the children. KTD trains volunteers through the following process: 1) workshops, 2) practice, and 3) participation as responsible music instructors. They are also given the opportunity to attend seminars led by experts on children's rights and other topics. In addition, KTD emphasizes the importance of peer review among volunteers.

They are given the opportunity to improve themselves through these activities. This allows them to hone their intellect and sensitivity based on "experience" rather than "hands-on" learning², different from the academic studies they major in at university. After graduating from university, they can use their intellect and sensitivity to lead to further socially inclusive movements.

The second is the impact on children. Volunteers do not only have expertise in music. Some major in art, others in English. Sometimes KTD performs Thai music, but English pop songs are played more often at the request of children. KTD sees pop songs as a means to teach English through music. The children living in Khlong Toei are not blessed with educational opportunities, but they are given the chance to "see the world" and "connect with the world" through the lyrics of songs. This view of the world provides a multifaceted perspective on Khlong Toei and is the driving force behind its development.

The music workshop is held once a week for three hours, for a three-month term. Each class is divided by instrument, with one volunteer per class (Photo 1). The three-hour

² "Experience" is the only word in English that refers to an event or occurrence one encounters, but in German, the expression is divided into *Erlebnisse*, which refers to what one undergoes, and *Erfahrung*, which means something that happens to one (Bauman: 1998=2010: 133). Similarly, in Japanese, the word "experience" can allude to multiple or life-changing events, rather than a one-time occurrence (Minamida: 2018: 83).



activity consists of four parts.

- 1) Check in & Brain Gym
- 2) Practice of instruments
- 3) Playing together in a full band
- 4) Reflection

The most important part of the workshop is the reflection session where children open up to each other and have dialogue. After the volunteer music instructors leave the room, children discuss what they like about and what to remove from their music, whether the songs are complete or not, and how they can improve them. It is a way to discipline their thinking and at the same time

develop their ability to make value judgments.

For many children, it is their first time touching a musical instrument. Small children start with instruments that are easy for them to handle, such as ukuleles and melodicas. Once they learn to play basic chords, they practice their favorite songs (interview with Staff Member B). The staff members find sheet music online and provide it to the children. They play a variety of instruments instead of just one, such as drums, bass, keyboards, guitar, and vocals. Student D (15 years old), who has been participating in the workshop since he was five years old, started with ukulele. He later learned to play the guitar, bass, drums, flute, and violin, as well as to sing. Volunteer music instructors are not the only ones who provide instruction in how to play instruments. Students seem to teach one another as “fellow musicians”.



The instruments used in the workshops of KTD are donations: the group has 10 drums and 100 guitars. Since the children are too poor to buy their own instruments, KTD also lends them instruments for practice, trusting them to take good care of them.

To demonstrate the results of this practicing, the staff members look for a place for the children to perform once a

month. Occasionally, they visit other communities to engage in outreach activities³.

³ See the Facebook pages of KTD and Music Sharing, where many videos are posted.

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Outreach activities are intended not only to present the results of the children's practice, but also to provide an opportunity to change the image of Khlong Toei. KTD also organizes the Rong-Moo Band at Klongtoey Djung Arts Festival once a year. This is the first performance for children who have taken music workshops for a year. At the same time, the event seems to function as a local festival that fosters the unity of the community, as families come to see their children perform.

2–3. Encounter with Various Societies through Popular Music

KTD's activities approach both internal and external transformations of the community. Khlong Toei attracts an inflow of ethnic minorities from Thailand and refugees from Myanmar. KTD is not only inclusive of Thai-speaking children born in Khlong Toei, but also of those who speak different languages. This inclusion is the philosophy and belief of the children as well as the staff members.

Student C, a 13-year-old girl, said that while she had never played in a band with refugee children from Myanmar, she believes, with respect to children's rights, that everyone has the opportunity to learn, regardless of where they come from, not limited to music.

Student D, a 15-year-old boy, has experience performing with Mon and Burmese refugee children. When I asked him about his session with the refugees from Myanmar, he gave me the following answer:

"I have two friends who also perform with me. I worked on a project with forty Mon people and I became friends with two of them. One of them is Burmese and the other one is Mon. They are good people and taught me how to play instruments because they play better than me. They taught me how to play the guitar and bass. They did not speak much Thai, but we were able to communicate through music."

He explained how important those friends were to him, as he had spent time with them playing music. Although they seem to have moved out of Khlong Toei, he has kept in touch with them and they visit the district to support the festival.

For the children of refugees and ethnic minorities, Khlong Toei may have been just a transit point. However, the fact that they continue to visit Khlong Toei even after having moved elsewhere seems to suggest that the district is one of the places they can call their own. Slums may present a negative image, but they are indispensable places for the marginalized, in the sense not of inorganic "spaces" but rather of "warm places" built through organic relationships among people.

https://www.facebook.com/MusicSharingTH/?ref=page_internal (accessed April 10, 2021)

Student D was seeking to demonstrate through hip-hop that there was more to Khlong Toei than violence and drugs. “I have been trying, but I still have a long way to go,” he said with a shy smile. When the author asked him what kind of lyrics he was writing, they turned out to be a true representation of the counterculture of hip-hop. He described the lyrics of his songs as follows:

“I wrote about our community. The lyrics represent my intention to change people’s mindset [the mindset of people outside of Khlong Toei]. People say that Khlong Toei is a scary place, but that ain’t true. I am going to change the way they see the district. I will show them the positive aspects of the Khlong Toei community.”

KTD also uses Thai music and children’s songs as teaching materials. However, Thai music is also intended for national unification, which can cause marginalized people to feel alienated. Volunteer music instructors actively provide popular music scores in response to children’s requests. While this may be an unexpected effect, the extensive use of popular music enables the children to embody the means by which marginalized people raise their voices. The embodied music connects the outer and inner worlds, transforming them into “intermediaries.”

2 – 4. Transformation of Children into Community Intermediaries through Arts Management

It is not only the music that transforms children into “intermediaries,” but also their involvement in arts management. In addition to performing, the children who participate in KTD also work as staff members to publicize their concerts, support backstage staff, and receive guests. In the publication activities, they make announcements and advertisements on the community cable radio and in a car resembling an election vehicle, and also create handmade posters and flyers to distribute to households in Khlong Toei. This gives them an opportunity to interact with the people of the community.

D (15 years old) has also been engaged in the group’s activities as a staff member since he was eight. He visits every household in Khlong Toei for publicity. The middle-aged residents of the community show their interest in and knowledge of the project⁴. Through PR activities, the children build self-confidence and improve themselves by learning to express themselves. D explains as follows that not only the music practice

⁴ One of the reasons for the positive response from the community is that there are not many festivals for children, and it is a moment for their own children to shine. The KTD festival is also a moment for the adults in the community to shine as parents through their children’s growth.

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but also the whole process of organizing the festival create a place for him to express himself:

“Before joining KTD, I had no place to express myself, but through PR activities, I was able to talk to my peers on the street. Every step is a chance to express yourself. I can tell them that they can do the same, that we can organize our own festival! It makes me happy to be able to talk to many people in the community!”

His words reveal that his involvement in arts management as well as in performance helps him grow as an individual. In addition, these activities provide children with opportunities to meet their peers. PR activities connect the world of children with the world of adults, contributing to the formation of a community.

Character formation and self-transformation were also evident in the 13-year-old female student who agreed to be interviewed. She has been participating in KTD’s music workshops since the age of five, and has been engaged in arts management since the age of eleven. She describes her experience as follows:

“When I first started working as a staff member, I was very shy, but I realize that I began to change gradually. My attitude has changed and now I am more talkative. I have made many friends and grown into an open lady!”

The most important point to emphasize in this respect is that the fact that the project’s impact is not limited to the children involved as staff members of KTD learning how to interact and communicate with others. Rather, what is noteworthy from the perspective of arts management is that the children, through their engagement in arts management, assume the role of “intermediaries” of community unity and “transformers” of the community.

The community of Khlong Toei still maintains the social spirit of an old-fashioned “village” compared to the rest of Bangkok. Nevertheless, the festivals organized by children provide opportunities for families to build relationships with each other. In addition, as D explained, children also make connections with each other. They transform themselves more and more widely through music. They gain a sense of belonging as they make friends. They meet adults through publicity. Their PR activities create opportunities for individuals of the Khlong Toei community to connect with each other, with children as the “intermediaries” of this process.

This is what sets the activities of KTD apart from traditional community music and arts management. In the existing theories, programs aimed at community building tend to be based on “business to business” or “organization to organization” network building

in the “adult” world. Community music research has tended to focus on how “music” contributes to children's development. These shortcomings of the previous studies may be due to the fact that musicians in general do not have a permanent space for community music. Many musicians, like “nomads” or “gypsies,” move from place to place, from time to time, as they work. KTD's space and constant activities that connect music and society (arts management) allow children to become “intermediaries” in the community. KTD has brought a new perspective to “music workshops for children”, which have tended to focus on the transformation of children themselves.

3. Conclusion

This paper presents the case of KTD, a group organizing music workshops for children in the Khlong Toei district, the largest slum in Bangkok. KTD is a pioneer not only in promoting the growth of children, but also in raising them to be “intermediaries” of society. Through the activities of KTD, children are able to escape the “negative cycle of risks” that they face, such as drug abuse and poverty. They also become “intermediaries” bringing individuals in the community together. Furthermore, they seek to change the image of their community through music.

What should be highlighted in the group's activities is that not only do the children perform, but they are also involved in the process of organizing festivals. Arts management training for children creates an opportunity for individuals to change society. This is something that has not been focused on in conventional music workshops and programs for children. Above all, the point of this paper is that the process of children's transformation into “intermediaries” or “innovators” is not a one-way educational process conducted by “adults.” The children themselves look at themselves and others, forming interactive relationships and enhancing their own expressions, to shape one another's personalities.

KTD is a relatively new organization, but its children have already begun to acquire various skills to convey their voices as a “silent minority” to the community and beyond. It will be interesting to witness what kind of activities the children growing up in this district will conduct in the future.

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