

Mr. Suchart Subsin
National Artist for Performing Arts (Folk Performance)
For the Year 2006

Background

Mr. Suchart Subsin was born on 2 July 1938 at Ban Sakaew, at 134 Mu 5, Sakaew sub-district, Thasala district in the province of Nakhon Si Thammarat. He completed his primary education from Sa-Kaew School.

His interest in *Nang Talung* or shadow-puppet play sprang from his talent in drawing since his childhood. While studying at Grade 3 at Sakew School, he was assigned by the school principal to teach drawing to his peers from Grades 1-4. At that time, Sakaew Monastery was building its ordination hall, and young Suchart spent his lunch hours observing the artisans drawing Thai designs and patterns on the building. Mr. Tuan, the master builder, took to him and taught him how to draw Thai drawing designs.

His father saw how interested he was in drawing the shadow-puppet characters and other pictures. On completion of Grade 4, he was sent to study under Mr. Tong Nukhao, a shadow-puppet carver and poet. The young boy soon learnt not only how to draw but also how to write poetry for the puppet play. At 14 he became a professional shadow-play artist, earning enough to support himself and his family. His talent has been well received by the public since.

Today

Today he still works as a shadow-play puppeteer as well as a master carver of *Nang Talung*. He is known as a local wise man devoting himself to educating and entertaining students, academics, media people, and local and international visitors. His performance and museum attract so many visitors on a regular basis that he hardly has time for rest. Though advanced in years, he has made it his life commitment to conserve, promote and teach the art of shadow-puppet play and puppet carving to as many people as possible. He, therefore, serves as a role model for his family and society at large, following His Majesty the King's statement that "Cultural conservation is national conservation".

Work

1. Shadow-puppet performance: Mr. Suchart Subsin has strived to maintain the traditional form of shadow play in the following ways:

1.1 He would never use Western musical instruments in his performance, believing that the five traditional musical instruments – *Mong* (a percussion instrument), *Ching* (a percussion instrument), *Thap* (a globlet-shaped drum), *Klong Tuk* (drum) and *Pi* (a quadrupled-reed oboe) – provide just enough aesthetics for the show. Today one will still see Western musical instruments in the middle of Suchart's House that are never used. This is a gesture to tell other shadow-play artists that "we can afford to buy them but choose not to use them, because some argue that we use old-fashioned instruments for lack of money to do otherwise".

1.2 He focuses on the traditional form of presentation, using various forms of narrative poetry to portray the story and characters. For instance, he uses *Klon-8* for narration, *Klon-6* and *Klon-4* for romantic display, or *Klon-4* to express displeasure.

1.3 There is no rude or vulgar word in his presentation. Rather, he uses word pun or double-entente for dramatic effect.

1.4 Performance is intended to convey temporary message and lessons alongside fun and entertainment.

2. Craftsmanship as a carver of *Nang Talung* and *Nang Yai* characters

Suchart lost his mother when he was 12. The family was poor. When he completed his primary education, he was about 13. He carved the puppet figures from paper and sold them at monastery fairs to support his family. He sold leather puppets to several *Nang Talung* puppeteers. During 1947-1957 paper puppets would fetch one baht each, while the leather ones would earn him 15 baht each. The nightly performance would bring him 30 baht. The puppets that he made for shadow play were made from clear and odorless hide. Thus, daytime was spent making puppets and evening was devoted to performing *Nang Talung* shadow play. The following briefly describes his development as an artist:

2.1 At age 12-15 he made paper puppets for sale to other children at monastery fairs.

2.2 At age 15-18, besides making paper puppets for children, he made puppets from hide as ordered by shadow play performers.

2.3 At age 19-20 he made hide puppets for his own use.

2.4 At age 20-30 he made hide puppets for personal use and as ordered by other shadow play artists.

2.5 At age 20-present, in addition to making hide puppets for personal use and for other shadow puppeteers, he began to make them for souvenirs. This is the life-changing time for him, for folk performing arts all over the country experienced a general decline in popularity. Western culture made itself felt, and more people took a new interest in folk music, public open cinemas, and *Ramwong*. *Nang Talung* shadow play rapidly lost its appeal. All this occurred against the background of Communist threats in the region and made it harder to perform the shadow play in the evening and at night. He, therefore, turned to carving and making shadow puppets in more creative forms, selling them to souvenir shops in Bangkok. He could be said to be the first person to turn *Nang Talung* figures into tourist souvenirs, creating the art of souvenir making in the process.

2.6 From age 40 to present he taught the art of making *Nang Talung* figures and puppets to his students, giving rise to an increased number of artisans who produced *Nang Talung* souvenirs for tourists and tourist shops throughout the country. In a way, the new competition from his students has forced him to come up with more innovative ideas of *Nang Talung* making.

Social Contributions

1. Conservation of *Nang Talung* performance

He is known for his adherence to the traditional practice of using folk musical instruments in the shadow play. While performing, he would demonstrate his masterly skill of puppet manipulation and recite poetry as befits the occasion. He does not only seek to entertain the audience but also informs them of various social issues at work. He inspires those who come to see the show.

2. Conservation of the making of *Nang Talung* figures and puppets

Nang Talung and *Nang Yai* making has been part of Mr. Suchart's career alongside his shadow play performances. He makes sure that the figures are made in accordance with the tradition. Leather tanning is the key to success. He also produces a number of innovative designs which other artisans have adopted as models.

3. Creation of *Nang Talung* Museum

Mr. Suchart's *Nang Talung* Museum consists of two buildings:

The first building is made of wood, with southern architectural design. It houses ancient objects, local tools and utensils used in Nakhon Si Thammarat and other southern provinces, including brassware, weaponry, and ancient chinaware.

The second building has two stories. The upper story is made of wood, while the lower floor is made of concrete. It houses ancient *Nang Talung* figures and puppets more than 100 years old, including clown figures and *Nang Talung* in the central region and

northeastern region, Muslim *Nang Talung* as well as those from other countries such as China, India, Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia. There, one can also see ancient musical instruments used for shadow play about 150-200 years old. The oldest *Nang Talung* figures are also on display at his Museum.

For all his work and dedication, Mr. Suchart has made it possible for students, academics, media people and tourists to appreciate the ancient art of *Nang Talung*. After more than 30 years of service, Suchart's House of *Nang Talung* was honoured by Tourism Authority of Thailand with a Thailand Tourism Award for cultural destination and site in 1996 and again in 2009 for being a learning and recreation centre.

Honours received by Suchart Subsin

In 1973 he received First and Third Prizes in *Nang Yai* competition organized by Department of Industrial Promotion at the annual festival of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

In 1975 he received First and Second Prizes in *Nang Yai* competition organized by Department of Industrial Promotion at the annual festival of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

In 1977 he received a commendation award for the annual handicraft product competition (leather goods), Bangkok, organized by Department of Industrial Promotion.

In 1979 he received First, Third and Commendation Prizes in *Nang Yai* competition organized by Department of Industrial Promotion at the annual festival of Nakhon Si Thammarat.

On 5 May 1985 he received Ministry of Industry's outstanding craftsman award on the anniversary celebration of the establishment of the Ministry.

On 22 December 1986 he received an outstanding award for mass media production for young people (folk media) from National Youth Bureau, Prime Minister's Office.

On 4 March 1987 he received Nakhon Si Thammarat's Outstanding Citizen Award from Nakhon Si Thammarat media groups.

In 1987 he received an honorary degree in Cultural Studies from Nakhon Si Thammarat Teacher College.

In 1988 he received a commemorative plaque from TAT's Surat Thani Office which organized a festival of Good Products from Upper Southern Region during 1-5 September 1988.

In 1989 he received an Outstanding Cultural Person Award (craftsmanship) from National Culture Commission.

On 7 September 1990 he received a plaque from Ministry of Public Health for his promotional work for World Health Day.

On 2 April 1990 he received a certificate of appreciation from Cultural Centre for Southern Region, Nakhon Si Thammarat Teacher College for his cultural conservation and promotion work.

In 1992 he received an "Excellent Cultural Business" Award from the Office of Business Promotion of Thailand.

In 1995 he received an award from the National Identity Board, Prime Minister's Office, for his promotion of children's activities geared toward development of democratic life on the National Children's Day.

On 13 October 1996 he received First prize for *Nang Talung* Performance Competition from Nakhon Si Thammarat Province.

In 1996 he received a Thailand Tourism Award for cultural destination and site from Tourism Authority of Thailand.

In 1997 he received an award from "Bantuek Khwam Di" (Record of Good Deeds) Programme from National Broadcasting Service Station of Thailand, Channel 11, Department of Public Relations. The program is designed to honour individuals and organizations for their good deeds in the promotion of Thai art, culture and tradition.

In 1997 he received an "Outstanding Artist of the Southern Region" award from Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkla's University.

During 13-21 October 2002 he went to Japan to perform *Nang Talung* shadow play by invitation of Tokushima Municipality, Japan.

On 23 December 2003 he received a plaque from Ministry of Justice for his role in promoting cultural identity as a means to rights protection, mediation and dispute resolution.

In 2006 he received a “Virtuous Person of Nakhon Si Thammarat” award from Nakhon Si Thammarat.

In 2006 he was recognized as National Artist for Performing Arts (Folk Performance).

In 2007 Suchart Subsin’s House of *Nang Talung* was chosen by National Culture Commission, Ministry of Culture, as an incubator for cultural enterprises.

In 2007 he received a certificate of appreciation for craftsmanship from Asian Handicraft Promotion and Development Association.

In 2009 he received a “Master Art Teacher of the Land” award from the SUPPORT Arts and Crafts International Centre of Thailand.

In 2009 he received a Thailand Tourism Award for providing a learning and recreation centre from Tourism Authority of Thailand.

As of 3 August 2011



***Nang Talung* Museum (Museum of Shadow-Puppet Play)
Suchart Subsin’s House of *Nang Talung***

Founded in 1987 by Mr. Suchart Subsin and his family, *Nang Talung* Museum is situated at No. 6, Soi Si Thammasok-3, Si Thammasok Road, Nai Mueang Sub-district, Mueang District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province 80000; Telephone 0 7534 6394.

Nang Talung Museum houses all kinds of traditional *Nang Talung* figures and puppets for shadow play from various regions of Thailand as well as from other countries. It also puts on display all kinds of musical instruments and equipment used in the performance. In this regard, it shows a history of Thai shadow play.



The museum collects in particular *Nang Talung* figures and puppets owned by Mr. Suchart Subsin and his family, providing a source of knowledge for the visitors who want to know how puppets for shadow play are made and manipulated during the performance.

It serves, therefore, to conserve, promote and pass the knowledge of *Nang Talung* to those interested in the subject. It functions under the slogan “If you work just for yourself, life is bleak. If you are truly dedicated, you will be remembered even after you are long gone”.



Founders of *Nang Talung* Museum: Mr. Suchart Subsin and Mr. Watee Subsin

For more than 20 years *Nang Talung* Museum established by Mr. Suchart Subsin and his family have provided knowledge to the visitors and served to conserve, promote, and pass on the art of making *Nang Talung* figures and puppets and performances to society at large. In 1996 Tourism Authority of Thailand presented it with a Thailand Tourism Award for cultural destination and site and again in 2009 for being a learning and recreation centre.

What visitors will gain from *Nang Talung* Museum

1. Knowledge about the art of making *Nang Talung* figures and puppets – something that Mr. Suchart and his family do for their living – from tanning the hide, designing the patterns, using carving tools and painting. Visitors will try their hands on making the figures first-hand under the supervision of Mr. Suchart and his family members. It is an ideal place for young people to learn how to make *Nang Talung* figures and puppets.

2. Knowledge about the performance of the shadow-puppet play on the premises. A small theatre is prepared for the purpose where visitors can watch the performance in front of the screen as well as behind the screen where the puppets are moved about. They will hear the master puppeteer sing and speak out the parts of various characters. The theatre also serves as a forum for teaching and exchange the knowledge of shadow play of various regions and countries among students, academics and local and international visitors.

3. Knowledge about the evolution and development of *Nang Talung* figures and puppets over the years. Some of the exhibits are more than 100 years old. They come from various parts of the countries. There is *Nang Talung* from the northern, central and northeastern regions. There is Muslim *Nang Talung* (performed in the three southern border provinces) as well as those from various countries, including Indonesia, China, India, Turkey, and Cambodia.



Mr. Watee Subsin also passes on the art of moving and manipulating *Nang Talung* figures and puppets to young people.