

252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet

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Abstract

This creative research presents the conceptual framework and compositional process of “252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet”, aiming to generate new knowledge in contemporary music and to disseminate the work through live performance. The composition draws inspiration from the 252-kilometer highway linking five provinces in Eastern Thailand—Trat, Chanthaburi, Rayong, Chonburi, and Chachoengsao. This route provides the structural foundation for melodic and harmonic development, organized into four movements (A–D), each portraying the atmosphere, motion, and cultural identity of its respective region.

The first movement (Trat–Chanthaburi) blends coastal folk melodies with flowing arpeggios and bright pentatonic tones, evoking the gentle rhythm of the sea. The second movement (Chanthaburi–Rayong) merges folk dance motifs with industrial rhythmic patterns, representing the coexistence of tradition and modernity. The third movement (Rayong–Chonburi) captures the joyful energy of coastal life through lively tempos and layered textures, reflecting the vibrancy of seaside festivals. The final movement (Chonburi– Chachoengsao) transitions toward inner tranquility, using sustained harmonics and soft pentatonic lines inspired by the serene flow of the Bang Pakong River.

Performed by an acoustic guitar quartet, the piece employs diverse techniques such as fingerstyle, percussive tapping, and textural layering to express emotional depth and depict the evolving landscape along the route. Ultimately, this composition offers a contemporary interpretation that unites sound, geography, and culture, symbolizing the spirit of travel through Thailand’s Eastern region.

Keywords: Eastern Thailand, Acoustic Guitar Quartet, Suite for Guitar

Introduction

Travel is not merely a change of location but a pathway to learning and creativity, offering artists opportunities to engage with diverse landscapes and cultures. Experiences gained through travel can be transformed into artistic inspiration, profoundly reflecting the images of communities and local environments. Such journeys are often perceived as catalysts for artistic creation, as they open new perspectives and allow the reinterpretation of cultural and geographical contexts through the medium of music and other art forms.

The Eastern region of Thailand encompasses diverse geographical and cultural settings, ranging from coastal landscapes, fruit orchards, and trading traditions to industrial areas and religious heritage. All of these are interconnected through a primary highway route that stretches across the region. From the perspective of creative tourism, which emphasizes participation and cultural experiences, it has been observed that designing experiences rooted in local culture—such as dance, music, or community workshops—can enhance cultural values, reinforce cultural identity, and sustainably contribute to the local economy (Suwannavej et al., 2025). Thus, the Eastern region serves not only as a geographical area but also as a cultural corridor rich in traditions, histories, and lived experiences.

Folk music in Eastern Thailand demonstrates this richness through its diverse forms, which reflect community life and local customs (Rattanaseth, 2016). Examples range from ritualistic ram khanong performances to narrative songs that tell stories of everyday life. As Rattanaseth (2019) noted, in Trat Province, Ram Suad performed by the Anek Sarnnetra troupe functions both as ritual practice and as a reflection of communal beliefs and traditions. More broadly, the Thailand Foundation emphasizes that Thai music as a whole is complex and multifaceted, utilizing plucked, bowed, struck, and blown instruments. Folk music, in particular, is not only entertainment but also a vehicle of intergenerational cultural transmission, acting as a valuable repository of intangible cultural heritage (Mongkolrat, 2025). Thus, folk music in Eastern Thailand may be understood as a living heritage that embodies cultural memory, spirituality, and social expression.

The integration of Thai and Western musical traditions has a long history, dating back to the reign of King Rama V, when Mahori ensembles were established under Western operatic influences. In contemporary contexts, this cross-cultural synthesis has evolved into new approaches in modern music composition. Scholars have argued that such fusion expands the audience while preserving Thai identity, thereby creating sonic landscapes that can communicate globally. Furthermore, research on arranging folk music from the

four regions of Thailand into solo or duet guitar formats has demonstrated that the integration of Thai idioms with Western instruments not only opens new artistic dimensions but also reveals the commercial potential of cultural creative works (Netpakdee & Amaro, 2024).

From this background—marked by the inspiration of travel, the cultural richness of Eastern Thailand, the vitality of its folk music, and the conceptual framework of Thai–Western musical fusion—the composer created “252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet.” This creative work consists of four movements corresponding to provinces in the Eastern region and employs a variety of acoustic guitar quartet techniques, such as fingerstyle, percussive tapping, and layered textures, to represent the emotions, landscapes, and cultural atmospheres of each locale. Ultimately, this suite functions as a “sound map,” guiding listeners through the cultural landscapes, geographical terrains, and musical narratives of the region, while simultaneously contributing new knowledge to the field of contemporary music.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of the research are threefold:

- 1) present the conceptual framework and compositional process of the musical work entitled “252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet”
- 2) generate new knowledge in the field of contemporary music
- 3) disseminate the creative work to the public

Theoretical Concepts

In preparing this creative work, the composer reviewed relevant literature and theoretical frameworks to establish a solid academic foundation for the development of the composition. The review can be categorized into three main areas:

Programmatic Composition

Programmatic music refers to instrumental compositions that carry an extra-musical narrative or depict images and scenes. In contrast to “absolute” music, which is purely abstract, programmatic works are explicitly inspired by literary ideas, legends, scenic descriptions, or personal stories (Britannica, n.d.). For example, Britannica defines program music as “instrumental music that carries some extramusical meaning, some ‘program’ of literary idea, legend, scenic description, or personal drama.” Such compositions often aim to evoke specific places, narratives or cultural imagery through musical

themes and motifs. In an academic context, Batubara (2017) explored how instrumental music can portray a story, using scenes from Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* as inspiration for a programmatic piece. Likewise, she provides a concrete example of programmatic composition combined with cross-cultural elements: her piece *Story of Tjong A Fie* musically narrates the life of a historical figure by blending Chinese penttonic modes, Indonesian Malay folk rhythms, and Western techniques. This demonstrates how composers use musical material to represent extra-musical content—in this case, reflecting a specific cultural narrative through music. Programmatic composition thus serves as a creative method to reflect places, stories or images by encoding them into musical storytelling, a practice well-documented in musicology and exemplified by many Romantic-era tone poems and contemporary works.

Integration of Folk Music into Contemporary/Classical Composition

In current scholarship, Puerta (2016) observes that leading guitar composers—performers Ernesto Cordero, Leo Brouwer, and Sérgio Assad “*share a knowledge of popular, folkloric and classical music*” and are committed to “*bridging these realms in their compositions in the classical tradition.*” This statement underlines how folk and popular idioms can be woven into contemporary classical repertoire, enriching it with new colors and cultural references. Academic journals also document many cases of folk integration: for example, Junita Batubara's programmatic composition (cited earlier) combines Chinese and Malay musical elements with Western form, illustrating cross-cultural fusion. In the Thai context, researchers actively explore folk-classical synthesis as well. Chaumklang (2019) arranged Northeastern Thai (Isan) folk songs in a classical chamber music style, demonstrating that local melodies can be reharmonized and orchestrated for Western instruments without losing their identity. His study notes that successful arrangement required understanding the folk tunes' cultural context (ethnomusicology) alongside classical harmony and counterpoint techniques (Chaumklang, 2019).

Acoustic Guitar Quartet Writing Techniques

Writing for an acoustic guitar quartet presents unique challenges and techniques, which are discussed in both performance guides and composition research. Unlike orchestral writing with diverse instruments, a guitar quartet is a homogeneous ensemble—all four voices share a similar timbre and pitch range. Noble and Cowan (2023) argue that orchestrating for such homogeneous ensembles follows the same perceptual principles as for mixed

instrumentation, but effects based on contrast “require greater attention to detail” from the composer in order to be effective. This means composers must carefully manage texture and balance so that important voices are audible and the parts do not blend indistinctly. One technique is to exploit the timbral possibilities of the guitars: scordatura (alternate tunings), natural harmonics, open-string drones, and varied attack articulations can differentiate voices even when all instruments are guitars (Noble & Cowan, 2023).

Process of Creation

The creative process of the project “252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet” was systematically designed and carried out in seven stages as follows:

1) The composer conducted an in-depth review of the literature related to Eastern Thai folk music, local traditions, and instrumental practices, as well as academic works in music composition and acoustic guitar performance. Emphasis was placed on understanding the region’s cultural and musical identity to form a conceptual foundation for integrating folk elements with contemporary compositional techniques. Additionally, relevant musical works were examined—such as folk-inspired guitar quartets, programmatic suites, and region-based compositions—to contextualize the project and demonstrate its expansion upon prior creative developments. For example, Netpakdee and Amaro (2024) arranged Thai regional folk songs for a classical guitar duet that blended Lisu tribal melodies from Northern Thailand into a chamber composition for guitar and string quartet.

2) A geographical survey of the five provinces—Trat, Chanthaburi, Rayong, Chonburi, and Chachoengsao—was undertaken through the use of digital tools and online media (Figure 1). The 252-kilometer route served as a conceptual framework, enabling the composer to associate musical material with the unique cultural and geographical characteristics of each province. Resources such as Google Maps, travel documentaries, environmental sound recordings, and videos of local traditions were employed to develop a sound-based representation of each location. This approach draws on digital ethnographic methods that emphasize “virtual walking” and site exploration through online interfaces (Svašek, 2023; Hsu, 2014; Suwanpakdee, 2018; Duangwises, 2023).

Figure 1

Map of Eastern Thailand



3) The composer proceeded to draft, notate, and refine the musical materials, focusing on the expressive interplay between folk sensibilities and acoustic guitar writing. Techniques involving harmony, rhythm, melodic development, and ensemble texture were applied to ensure that each movement conveyed both narrative depth and regional atmosphere.

4) The composition was rehearsed and recorded to a professional standard, ensuring that performance quality and sonic detail were preserved for both artistic presentation and scholarly analysis. The recording process also served as a medium for evaluating interpretive fidelity and musical coherence.

5) Structural and stylistic analysis was carried out using Western analytical frameworks, alongside examination of folk-inspired elements such as pentatonic harmony, motivic design, and textural layering. The aim was to highlight the synthesis of traditional folk aesthetics and modern compositional language, drawing on Noble and Cowan (2023).

6) Upon completion of the composition, the composer summarized the creative findings, reflecting on the artistic, theoretical, and cultural insights gained throughout the process. This included consideration of the challenges and outcomes associated with translating regional identity into contemporary ensemble writing.

7) Finally, the completed work was prepared for academic presentation and public dissemination through conference performance and publication. This enabled interested audiences to experience the music, engage with its conceptual foundation, and contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding culturally rooted composition in the modern era.

Conclusion

The creative outcome of “252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet” consists of four sections (A–D), corresponding to the journey across five provinces from Trat to Chachoengsao, covering a total distance of 252 kilometers. Each section musically reflects the landscapes, cultures, and atmospheres of the region, combining local folk elements with Western compositional techniques.

Section A: Trat–Chanthaburi

The composition in Section A draws inspiration from the geographical route connecting Trat to Chanthaburi, as illustrated in the map. This route serves as the structural basis for the principal theme, symbolizing the commencement of a coastal journey that interlinks the two provinces.

Figure 2

Map of Trat–Chanthaburi



Figure 3

Example of the melody for Trat–Chanthaburi Route

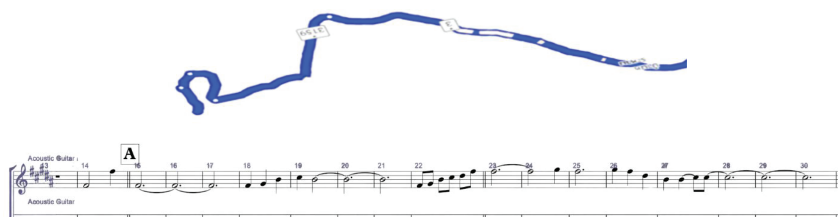


Figure 3 illustrates a secondary melody that rises and falls in correspondence with the map route from Trat to Chanthaburi. It begins in the key of B Major, set in 3/4 time at a tempo of 120 bpm. The composer employs the pentatonic scale in developing this melodic progression.

The composer transcribed segments of the “Khothan” melody performed by the Ban Thung Kaidak Khon troupe of Trat Province and adapted them for the second guitar part. The key was adjusted to align with the principal theme, as illustrated in the example below.

Figure 4

Beggar Song, Bantungkaidug Ensemble, Trat Province



Figure 5

Excerpts from the Khothan melody, Ban Thung Kaidak Khon troupe, Trat Province



Section B: Chanthaburi–Rayong

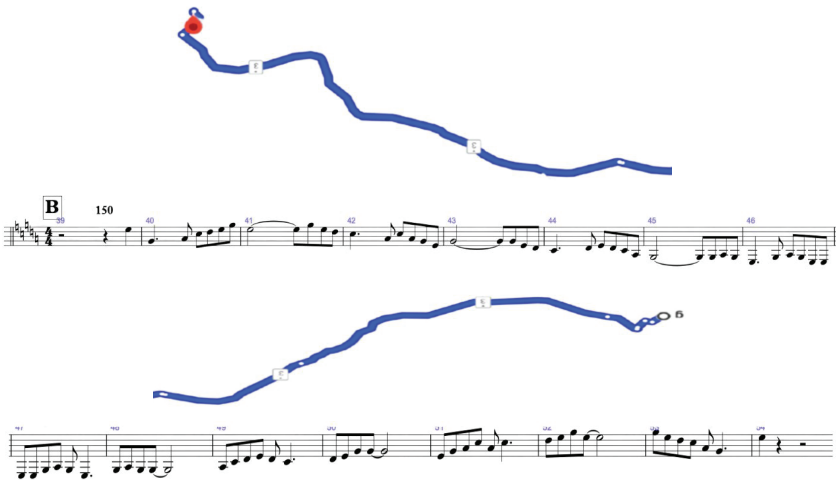
The composition in Section B is inspired by the geographical route linking Chanthaburi and Rayong, as represented on the map.

Figure 6
Map of the Chanthaburi–Rayong Route



Figure 6 illustrates a secondary melody that ascends and descends following the mapped route from Chanthaburi to Rayong. The composer modulates from the key of B Major to C Major, employing a 4/4 time signature at a tempo of 150 bpm. The pentatonic scale is also used in the development of this melodic line.

Figure 7
Melody of the Chanthaburi–Rayong Route



Additionally, the composition employs contrapuntal movement between individual guitar lines to reflect the overlapping pathways within the marketplace (see Figure 7). The composer utilizes retrograde pitches and rhythm in the second guitar part, and retrograde pitches in the third guitar part, to portray the interactions of daily life. This contrapuntal texture also represents the transition from the bustling atmosphere of Chanthaburi's markets (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Retrograde pitches and rhythm technique was applied.



Section C: Rayong–Chonburi

The composition in Section C is inspired by the geographical route between Rayong and Chonburi, as illustrated on the map. It seeks to portray the image of Rayong as an industrial city that coexists with traditional ways of life (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Map of the Rayong–Chonburi Route



Figure 10

Example of the melody for Rayong–Chonburi Route

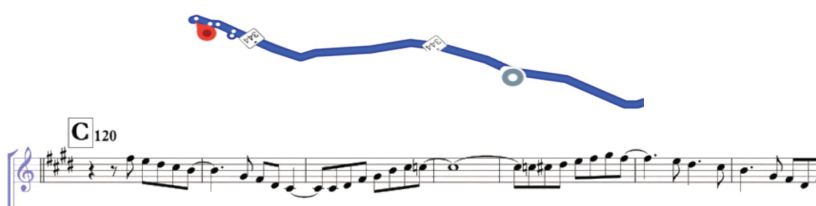


Figure 10 illustrates a melodic contour that rises and falls along the mapped route from Rayong to Chonburi. The composer adopts this as the principal theme, modulating from C Major to E Major, using a 4/4 time signature at a tempo of 120 bpm. Images of industrial factories and shipping ports highlight the dynamic nature of the region as an economic hub. In response to this context, the composition employs steady and forceful rhythmic patterns to reflect the sound of machinery and industrial labor, further enhanced by percussive guitar tapping techniques that emulate production and transportation sounds.

The composer also incorporates the melody of “Rayong Khwaen Thai Ngam” by Eua Sunthornsanan (Weawwuthinan, 2022), reinterpreted through harmonic development to create a cultural resonance within the industrial setting (Figure 11). As the journey continues into Chonburi, the music transitions to more vibrant melodies and lively rhythms, symbolizing the bustling character of this coastal province, which serves as both an economic center and a contemporary tourist destination.

Figure 11

Eua Sunthornsanan



Section D: Chonburi–Chachoengsao

The composer employs the A chord, the dominant (V) of D major in the introduction of this section (Figure 12), to symbolize the radiant light of a new day, leading smoothly into Section D which follows (Figure 13).

Figure 12

Example of the introductory melody



Figure 13

Map of the Chonburi–Chachoengsao Route

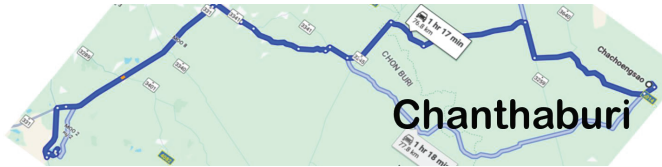


Figure 14

Example of the melody for Chonburi–Chachoengsao Route



Figure 14 illustrates a secondary melody that rises and falls in correspondence with the map route from Chonburi to Chachoengsao. It begins in the key of D Major, set in 3/4 time at a tempo of 120 bpm. The composer employs the pentatonic scale to develop this melodic sequence, using a descending chord progression of Dmaj7, C#m7, Bm7, and A7.

Figure 15

The addition of delay and reverb effects



As the journey continues into Chachoengsao, symbolic references to batik crafts and the riverside environment are introduced. The music gradually shifts in tone toward tranquility, employing harmonics and gentle melodic figures to convey serenity and spirituality.

Overall, Section D encapsulates a cultural and emotional transition—from the liveliness and excitement of Chonburi to the calmness and sacredness of Chachoengsao—achieved through the layering of textures and multidimensional musical structures.

The creative work “*252 Kilometers through Eastern Thailand: A Suite for Acoustic Guitar Quartet*” represents more than a musical composition; it embodies a cultural and geographical journey. Each section—Trat to Chanthaburi, Chanthaburi to Rayong, Rayong to Chonburi, and Chonburi to Chachoengsao—captures the essence of place through sound, blending local traditions with contemporary guitar quartet techniques. From the tranquil seashores of Trat and the bustling marketplaces of Chanthaburi, to the industrial resonance of Rayong and the spiritual calm of Chachoengsao, the composition functions as a soundscape map that guides listeners across landscapes, histories, and identities. By weaving together folk motifs, rhythmic vitality, harmonic layering, and modern effects (Figure 15), the suite not only illustrates the cultural richness of Eastern Thailand but also contributes to the broader field of contemporary music by bridging tradition and innovation

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Biography

Krittavit Bhumithavara, Ph.D. is the Head of the Bachelor of Arts Program at the Institute of Science, Innovation, and Culture, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep. He earned his doctoral degree from the Graduate School of Philosophy, College of Music, Mahidol University, where he also completed his master’s degree in Musicology and his bachelor’s degree in Jazz Studies. Dr Bhumithavara’s expertise spans across multiple areas of music. As a jazz electric guitarist and composer, he specializes in jazz and contemporary music while also maintaining strong academic grounding in musicology and ethnomusicology. His scholarly and creative pursuits encompass Western

music composition, sound engineering, and innovative approaches to music research. In addition, he has established himself as a leading figure in creative music research, integrating traditional and modern elements to expand the frontiers of musical knowledge. Beyond his academic and research contributions, Dr Bhumithavara has extensive experience as a conductor, directing big bands, string ensembles, and contemporary music groups. His work bridges performance, research, and innovation, underscoring his role as both an educator and a cultural innovator in the field of contemporary music.

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