

## The art of storytelling in Vietnam and in Thailand

By Mai-Ly Lehoux (ไมลีย์ เลอฮู)<sup>1</sup>

### “Nang Talung” or หนังตะลุง



“Nang” means “skin”, “Thalung” means “long stick”, then “Nang Talung” is used in Thai shadow puppetry controlled by a stick through the skin of an animal.

#### Origins

The origins of "Nang Talung" can be traced back to the southern region of Thailand, particularly in the Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces. It has roots in local folklore, traditions, and storytelling practices that date back centuries.

Historically, "Nang Talung" was not just a form of entertainment but also served as a means of cultural expression and communication. It was often used to convey moral lessons, myths, and legends, and to reflect the daily lives and beliefs of the local communities.

The art form involves the manipulation of intricately crafted shadow puppets made from leather or buffalo hide. These puppets are delicately designed to represent various characters, animals, and objects.

#### The water puppetry or “Múa rối nước”

---

<sup>1</sup> Folklore Museum Volunteer



“múa” means “dance” in Vietnamese, “rối” means “puppet” and “nước” means “water”. So this is a show on the water with puppets that are always controlled with a long stick. This stick is used to control the position of the puppets, but also to control their body members if we pull on a string placed under the puppets. In the image below, we can see the puppeteers with their long sticks



## Origins

“Múa rối nước” in Vietnamese has its origins in the rice fields of the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam, where it was originally performed as a form of entertainment for farmers during the flooding season. The history of “Múa rối nước” dates back to the 11th century during the Ly Dynasty, although the exact origins are somewhat unclear.

Traditionally, puppeteers would stand waist-deep in water behind a bamboo screen, manipulating puppets on long bamboo poles. These puppets were intricately carved and painted to represent various characters, animals, and mythical creatures. The performances were accompanied by traditional music, singing, and storytelling, often depicting scenes from Vietnamese folklore, legends, and daily life.

Over time, “Múa rối nước” evolved into a sophisticated art form, gaining popularity and recognition both within Vietnam and internationally. Today, it is considered a unique cultural treasure and continues to be performed in theaters and festivals across Vietnam, showcasing the rich heritage and creativity of Vietnamese puppetry traditions.

## References

<https://parfumdautomne.fr/marionnettes-sur-leau-vietnam-ou-voir-spectacles/#:~:text=et%20créatures%20mythiques.,Histoire%20du%20spectacle%20de%20marionnettes%20sur%20l'eau,de%20la%20récolte%20du%20riz.>

<https://vac-tours.com/le-spectacle-des-marionnettes-sur-leau-au-vietnam/>