

Applying Interdisciplinary Approach to the “Lavapura Dance” Performance

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— *Review of* —
**Integrative
 Business &
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 — *Research* —

ABSTRACT

Performing Arts is truly relating to various fields of study. To create one performance, researching is a key factor leading to the success of the show. This article aims to study how the interdisciplinary approach was employed to the creation of “Lavapura Dance” by Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts. The research design is qualitative and the data were collected through interview, observation, documentation study, and field work. The data relating to the dance name, costumes design, choreography, and music composition were analyzed by basing on the interdisciplinary framework including archeology, history, dance anthropology, linguistics, and music anthropology. The research findings reveal that the dance itself is a perfect combination between Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures. The two cultures were harmoniously blended and the audience can feel the essence of Dvaravati glorious past and the vibrant modern Mon culture.

Keywords: Lavapura Dance, Interdisciplinary Approach

1. Introduction

Interdisciplinary is the combining of two or more academic disciplines into one activity or a research project. The term *interdisciplinary* is applied within education and training pedagogies to describe studies that use methods and insights of several established disciplines or traditional fields of study. Interdisciplinary involves researchers, students, and teachers in the goals of connecting and integrating several academic schools of thought, professions, or technologies.

After the staff at Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts collected data through interview, observation, documentation study, and field work, the data relating to the dance name, costumes design, choreography, and music composition were analyzed by basing on the interdisciplinary framework including archeology, history, music anthropology, linguistics, and dance anthropology. They were inspired to create the dance called ‘Lavapura’ to remind Thai people of Dvaravati’s glorious past and, at the same time, to cherish the existence of the modern-day Bang Khan Mak’s Mon people and their culture.

Lavapura, an ancient name of Lopburi, was recognized as an important city during the Dvaravati period. Situated on the west bank of the Chao Phraya River, Lavapura was a melting pot of cultural diversities, i.e., Mon, Khmer, Tai, or Hindu. When the Mon people came into power and ruled the Kingdom around the 11th-16th centuries, they brought with them the Mon culture which was later blended harmoniously with other cultures existing in the region. Then, the Dvaravati culture emerged, which was exactly dominated by the Mon’s.



Figure 1: Pictures of Dvaravati Women, Modern Day Mon Women, Dvaravati Sculpture and Lavapura's silver coin

(Source: Khunsong, 2012; Songkalayanawat, 2015; National Museum)

Lavapura was a flourishing city with its refined social and economic systems. The Dvaravati people had their own currency in the form of silver coins inscribed 'Lava' on the obverse and 'Pura' on the reverse in a Pallava derived script of the 7th or 8th century (Boeles, 1967). The inscriptions of 'Lava' and 'Pura' on the coins confirmed the existence of the city 'Lavapura' dating back to the Dvaravati period. Most of Lavapura residents were farmers and traders. They had their own written language and practiced Buddhism. Conches and drums were the main musical instruments widely played during that time.

Based on the archeological evidences in Khu Bua, Ratchaburi and U Thong, Suphanburi, it can be said that the Dvaravati people dressed like Indian people. Dvaravati women held their hair in a high bun or had the hair braided and curved over their foreheads. Earrings, bracelets, necklaces, and decorative breast plate were commonly worn. These accessories were made of bronze and colored beads. The women wore no blouses but had a breast plate and a shawl which hung over from the left to the right shoulder to protect their naked breasts. They wore no shoes. As for the skirts, the ladies wore hand-woven long skirts or 'sarong' in Thai (Khunsong, 2012, pp. 43-98).

Apart from the archeological evidences mentioned above, the descendants of the Dvaravati-Mon can still be found in Lopburi. The Mon people living in Bang Khan Mark, Lopburi, have lived in the area for hundreds of years. Interestingly, these modern day Mon people have retained their culture and traditions such as the Mon language, religious practice, rituals, music, dances, values and beliefs (Sonsakul, 1992; Panitkul, 2011).

According to Bhabha (1994), culture can be hybridized and emerged as a new form or new cultural identity (Hall: 1996). When considering the Dvaravati and modern-day Mon cultures, it is quite clear that the cultures have been well blended with other cultures existing in the region, and resulted in distinctive Dvaravati-Mon cultures.

2. Aims of the study

This research aims to study how the interdisciplinary approach was employed to the "Lavapura Dance" performed by Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts.

The creation process of ‘Lavapura Dance’ was investigated regarding the history of the dance name, choreography design, costumes design, and musical composition.

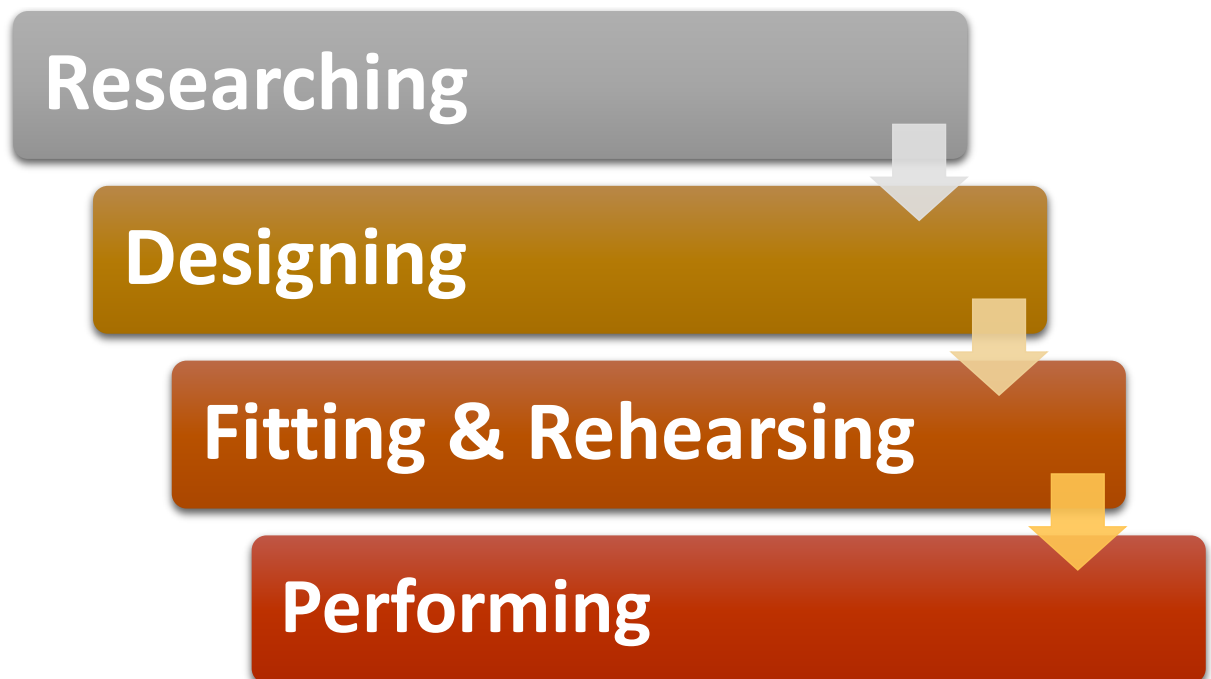
3. Methodology

The research design is qualitative and the data were collected through interview, observation, documentation study, and field work. The data relating to the dance name, costumes design, choreography, and music composition were analyzed by basing on the interdisciplinary framework including archeology, history, music anthropology, linguistics, dance anthropology. The informants can be divided into 3 groups as follows:

1. ‘Lavapura Dance’ creators:
 - Mrs. Wattana Kosinanon, a Thai classical dance and music expert, Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts
 - Mr. Namwa Romphothong, a Thai classical music expert, Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts
2. Historical and archeological expert
 - Mrs. Poonsri Jeebkaew, a historian specializing in Lopburi history in the Dvaravati period
3. Local wisdom elites:
 - Phra Panyawut, Wat Bang Khanmak, Lopuri
 - Mr. Sutas Leekpal, Bang Khanmak Village Headman

4. Findings

The creation process of “Lavapura Dance” can be divided into 4 main stages: 1) researching, 2) designing, 3) fitting and rehearsing, and 4) performing stages as shown in the following diagram. However, in this paper, only researching, designing, fitting & rehearsing stages were investigated to see how interdisciplinary approach was employed at each stage.



The findings can be revealed as follows:

4.1 History of the Dance Name

At the researching stage, the interdisciplinary framework of archeology and history was employed to investigate why and how the dance was named as “Lavapura Dance.”

The creation of the name Lavapura Dance by Mrs. Wattana Kosinanon, of Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts, was inspired by the name ‘Lavapura’ which was inscribed on the silver coin unearthed at the archeological site in U Thong, Suphanburi. The coin was once used as Dvaravati currency with the inscriptions of ‘Lava’ on the obverse and ‘Pura’ on the reverse (Boeles, 1967).

Based on historical research, during that time Lopburi was named ‘Lavapura’; therefore, the name itself reflects the period when the Dvaravati-Mon culture was flourishing.

From a linguistic aspect, the term “Lavapura” is considered as Pallava language which was used dating back to the Dvaravati period.

To check for accuracy, the triangulation technique was also employed at this researching stage. This name was also supported by Mrs. Poonsri Jeebkaew, an expert in Lopburi history during the Dvaravati period, that the name ‘Lavapura’ could reflect the strong identity of Lopburi as the center of Dvaravati Kingdom.

Another reason that the name of the dance was called Lavapura was because the college also wanted to promote Lopburi history and to cherish the Mon people of Bang Khanmak. If the dance had been named ‘Dvaravati’, the audience might not have felt the essence of Lopburi itself. As a result, the name ‘Lavapura’ was the best choice. Most people know that the name ‘Lopburi’ was derived from ‘Lavapura’ and reflects Lopburi’s strong identity as the land of the Dvaravati culture.

4.2 Costume Design

For the research and design stage, the costume design of ‘Lavapura Dance’ was a combination between Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures. It employed historical and archeological framework. The ultimate goal is to show how the ancient Dvaravati has become alive with a touch of modern Mon through this design. The audience is able to perceive and appreciate how the old and the new were well blended.

The triangulation technique was employed at the researching and designing stage for more accuracy. Different groups of informants were invited to discuss and give feedback to the costume design.

4.2.1 Design of Hairstyle

Regarding the design of the hairstyle for “Lavapura Dance,” archeological and historical approach was used. As evidenced by archeological artifacts (sculptures and base-reliefs depicted below), the high bun hairstyle with tiara was typically worn by Dvaravati women which can still be found among modern Mon women living in Bang Khanmak. Thus, the high bun hairstyle truly reflects both Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures (Sonsakul, 1992). This served as the basis for the designer to create the hairstyle used by performers in the Lavapura Dance.



Figure 2: High Bun Hairstyle with Tiara Specifically Designed for ‘Lavapura’ Dancers; Modern Mon Women with High Bun Hairstyle; Drawing and Sculpture Showing Dvaravati Women Hairstyle

(Source: Songkalayanawat, 2015; Khunsong, 2012; National Museum)

4.2.2 Design of Accessories

Regarding the accessories, its creation was based on the interdisciplinary framework including archeology and history. The designer admitted that Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures were her main inspiration as the set of earrings, necklace, and bracelet designed to be used in ‘Lavapura Dance was inspired by the sculpture of Dvaravati women demonstrated in the pictures below. Colored beads were also used in the creator’s design to reflect Dvaravati culture as colored beads were used to show the essence of Dvaravati culture. During the Dvaravati period, colored beads were popularly used as part of the accessories (Khunsong, 2012) and thousands of Dvaravadi beads were unearthed in many of the archeological sites in the central region of Thailand (Inthrawut, 1999).



Figure 3: Earrings Worn by Lavapura Dancers; Sculpture and Drawing of Dvaravati Women with Earrings

(Source: Songkalayanawat, 2015; National Museum; Khunsong, 2012)



Figure 4: Necklace and Bracelet Worn by Lavapura Dancers; Dvaravati Bead Necklace; Drawing of Dvaravati Women with Necklace and Bracelet
(Source: Songkalayanawat, 2015; National Museum; Khunsong, 2012)

4.2.3 Design of Breast Wrap and Shawl

The design of the breast wrap and shawl for 'Lavapura' Dancers was design by basing on the interdisciplinary framework including archeology and history. The design was based on drawings of Dvaravati women and the sculpture of Camdevi, a well known Dvaravati princess. But although Camdevi Sculpture and drawings of Dvaravati women demonstrated that Dvaravati women were topless, breast plates and shawls were used to cover their breasts by wrapping the shawls over one's shoulder around the breasts and back. Therefore, beige breast wraps were designed by the costume designers to cover the dancers' breasts in order to reflect the Dvaravati culture. Shawls are still part of the design by hanging them over the dancers' shoulders. Shawls are still used today by modern Mon women as part of their dress attire. Therefore, the design of the top part reflects both Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures.

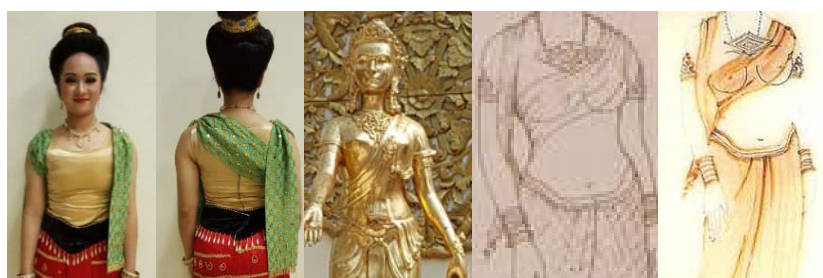


Figure 5: Lavapura Dancers with Breast Wrap and Shawl; Camdevi Sculpture; Drawing of Dvaravati Women

(Source: Songkalayanawat, 2015; National Museum; Khunsong, 2012)

4.2.4 Design of Skirt and Waist Band

Basing on the interdisciplinary framework which includes archeology and history, the design of the skirt and the waist band used in 'Lavapura Dance' was inspired by Camdevi sculpture which portrayed how a Dvaravati princess was dressed up. During that time, a Dvaravati princess wore a calf length skirt or sarong wrapped around the lower part of the

body (from the waist downwards) with waist band decorated with precious stones. However, the modern Mon women wear ankle length sarongs which are different from those worn in the Dvaravati period. Consequently, a calf length sarong with a waistband decorated with beads so the dancers can move more freely and comfortably was designed by the experts costume designer of the Lavapura Dance.



Figure 6: Sarong and Waist Band Worn by Lavapura Dancer; Camdevi Sculpture; Drawing of Dvaravati Woman

(Source: Songkalayanawat, 2015; National Museum; Khunsong, 2012)

4.3 Choreography Design

For the fitting and rehearsing stage, basing on the interdisciplinary framework of dance anthropology, Mrs. Wattana Kosinanon, a Thai classical dance expert who designed the choreography for 'Lavapura Dance' was inspired by local Mon dance patterns of Bang Khanmak. These local dance patterns were applied to some of Thai classical dance patterns including 'Tha Khaek Taw Khao Rang', 'Tha Yeuang Pai Katin', 'Tha Liap Khai', and 'Tha Long Lai Dai Sin'. It can be said that the new choreography designed for 'Lavapura Dance' was the good combination between Thai classical dance patterns and local Mon dance patterns. It consisted of 4 dance patterns as follows: 'Tha Awk', 'Tha Wai', 'Tha Sod Soong', and 'Tha Jop' as shown in the pictures below.



Figure 7: Lavapura Dancers Performing 'Tha Awk' and 'Tha Wai'

(Source: Songalayanawat, 2015)

The above picture (left) shows Lavapura dancers performing 'Tha Awk' or 'Starting to Walk'. This dance pattern is designed to show Mon women's graceful walk. To perform this step, the dancers slide their feet gracefully to the side and move with the arms swaying. The above picture (right) shows Lavapura dancers performing 'Tha Wai' or 'Showing Respect'. 'Wai' is a traditional Thai way to greet people or show respect to the elderly or those with higher status. This dance pattern is designed to demonstrate how Mon people show respect to their ancestors who once lived in Lavapura.



Figure 8: Lavapura Dancers Performing ‘Tha Sod Soong’ and ‘Tha Jop’
(Source: Songkalayanawat, 2015)

The above picture (left) shows Lavapura dancers performing ‘Tha Sod Soong’ or ‘Raising the Arm up High’. This pattern is typically local Mon dance pattern which reflects the graceful movement of Mon women. To perform the dance pattern, dancers sway their bodies to the rhythm of the music. The above picture (right) shows Lavapura dancers performing ‘Tha Jop’ or ‘Finale’. This dance pattern is designed to show the joyfulness of Mon women.



Figure 9: Local Mon Dance Performed by Bang Khanmak Villagers
(Source: Wat Amphawan’s Archives, 2015)

The choreography patterns designed for ‘Lavapura Dance’ are the combination between Thai classical and local Mon dance patterns. Thai classical dance patterns are used as the basic patterns while the local Mon dance patterns are added to remind the audience of the Mon people characteristics: politeness and subtleness. In this case, the choreography designer is successful because she effectively conveyed the message regarding the Mon people’s personality through the dance patterns. Thai classical dances are not just to please the eyes or ears but also to provide the audience the food for thought (Thongkhamsuk, 2002; Iamsakul, 2011).

4.4 Musical Composition

The composer, within the framework of music anthropology composed the song for ‘Lavapura Dance’ as a Thai song but with a touch of the Mon musical culture. In so doing, he decided to use Mon musical instruments in the song, so the spirit of Mon musical culture can be perceived by the audience. Mon musical instruments have a long history, dating back to the Dvaravati period when conches and drums were popularly played. Nowadays, many of Mon musical instruments are commonly used in Thai classical songs (Khongpin, 1996). Mr. Namwa Romphothong, a Thai classical music expert, who composed the music for ‘Lavapura Dance’, was inspired by Mon music culture which has been passed from one generation to another and still active today. The Mon essence was added to his composition in order to

show the audience the spirit of Dvaravati culture. The musical instruments played in the song include Cha-ke (plucked zither), Khlui (flute), Ranat Ek (higher xylophone), Ranat Thum (lower xylophone), Ranat Tat (a type of xylophone), Gongs, Taphon Mon (large drum played with the hand), Ching (small cymbals), Chap (flat cymbals), and Poengmang (Mon drum).

5. Conclusion and Discussion

After analyzing the data concerning the process of 'Lavapura Dance' creation through interviews with the five informants, it can be said that the data relating to the dance name, costumes design, choreography, and music composition were analyzed by basing on the interdisciplinary framework including archeology, history, music anthropology, linguistics, and dance anthropology. The essence of Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures can be felt all through the show. The two cultures were well blended and reflected from the dance name, costume design, choreography patterns, and musical composition. According to the interviews with two local wisdom elites and a historian and archeological expert, they all agreed that the show itself is a perfect combination of both Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures. The two cultures were harmoniously blended and the audience can feel the essence of the glorious past of Dvaravati and the vibrant modern Mon culture.

6. Suggestions

1. Bunditpatanasilpa Institute should provide more supports to the study of Thai local cultural heritage. Thai culture and way of life cannot be separated. The institute should promote its personnel to create more performances relating to Thai cultural and historical heritage. These performances can also be used to help promote and educate people about local history.
2. Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts should create the data base focusing on Lopburi's local culture. This new body of knowledge will be beneficial for further study and, at the same time, can help educate the people.

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