

The Creative Process of the Thai Neo-Traditional Dance Performance SAKKARATHEWARAT

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of the research “The Creative Process of the Thai Neo-Traditional Dance Performance *Sakkarathewarat*” are to study the creative process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* and to keep a record of the acquired knowledge about Thai dramatic arts. The research was conducted by studying documents and by interviewing various Thai dance masters, who contributed to the creation of Thai dance performances. A record of the choreography was detailed and then, a focus group with Thai dance experts validated the collected data. The results of the study showed that the creative process for this performance can be divided into 7 steps: 1) the conception of the performance; 2) the creation of the melody and music; 3) the casting of the performers; 4) the creation of the choreography; 5) the design of the costumes and accessories; 6) the presentation to the Thai dance masters and experts; 7) the promotion of the performance *Sakkarathewarat* to the public both within the country and abroad. The choreography’s meaning is divided into 3 phases: 1) the introduction to a royal ceremony; 2) Buddhist faith; 3) a moment to pay homage. There are 5 different blocking alignments on stage: a line parallel to the audience, lines in diagonal, balanced and unbalanced display, in group and double row perpendicular to the audience.

Key words: dramatic art dance creation, Sakkarathewarat, Thai Neo – Traditional Dance Performance, The Creative Process

PREFACE

The Ayutthaya World Heritage culture has a significant importance for Thailand. Its historical background has maintained its importance over the past four centuries. During the Ayutthaya era, there was prosperity in all aspects especially for the arts found in each period, which reflects its cultural foundation. The faith in Buddhism (Fine Arts Department. 2549: 1) in addition to the most revered respect to the king appeared in different forms of ritual.

From the study of the information about beliefs related to the divine origins of the king and of him being compared to the god Phra Inn, the mightiest god in heaven, we got the idea to create a new Thai dance performance in order to show our highest respect, our loyalty and our gratefulness to the king. His majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej, beloved king of the people, has followed the 10 rules of a good monarch during his long reign: 1) be generous; 2) may your words, actions and thoughts be an example for the people; 3) sacrifice your own comfort for the wellbeing of others; 4) have an honest mind; 5) show gentleness; 6) be diligent in your work; 7) remain calm in any situations; 8) restrain from abusing others; 9) be patient; 10) do the right thing as prescribed by traditions. Throughout his reign, the king has been a tireless worker to help his land and its people to evolve and have a better future. Thai people have been lucky to live in this country under the care of their beloved king. Therefore, the Faculty of Arts and Music has decided to create this Thai dance piece inspired by the study of royal ceremonies, sculptures, paintings, literature, entertainments, dance movements

from various forms of shows and the creation process of performances. According to the Royal Institute of Thai Language, the name of the performance *Sakkarathewarat* is derived from the pali language: “Sakkara” means worship (2542:1157); “thewa” means angel (2542:540); and “racha” means king or monarch (2542:949). Thus, the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* has been created around the idea to worship, to praise and to admire the king who has the favor of its people because they are conscious about his devoted hard work. The Faculty of Arts and Music has presented and promoted the piece *Sakkarathewarat* to the public and received positive critics and comments. The faculty has been honored twice to promote Thai dramatic arts abroad by accompanying the royal delegation while visiting other countries.

From the experiences mentioned above, we can conclude that the piece *Sakkarathewarat* has been recognized in the country as abroad for its creative work. It has also received an award at the national level to recognize its creativity and promotion of a performing style. It is a creative piece, which has beauty for its representation of the Thai traditional dance fundamentals that could serve as a model to guide the creation of other performances. The steps of the creation process for this performance are to define the concept, the choreography, the music, the costumes, the blocking and the use of space on stage. Since there isn't a standardized record of the creation process, this approach can be useful and interest parties from the fields of arts and dance. Thus, the researcher recognizes the need and the importance to record the creation process so that it serves as a basis of knowledge and that the way to create the piece *Sakkarathewarat* can benefit the study of Thai dance. Furthermore, it could serve as a guide to create new Thai dance performances for the academic studies of Thai dance. It is also a proof of the acquired knowledge and a record of the intellectual property of the Buditpatanasilpa Institute.

OBJECTIVE

The objectives are to study the creation process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* and to keep a record of the acquired knowledge about Thai dramatic arts.

SCOPE

It is about the study of the creation process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* from the Faculty of Arts and Music at the Buditpatanasilpa Institute.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research has applied the following methods:

1. Analysis of documents related to the creation process. The Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* includes ideas and theories about: the creation of Thai dramatic art performances, contemporary arts, Ayutthaya's culture, dance execution, dance movements and dance creation prototypes. The study also includes analysis of research papers and creative works from different sources of information such as studies from the Academic Resources Office, the Office of Performing Arts, the National Library, the archives, etc.
2. The study of the creation process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* is as follow:

- 2.1 The Interviews of people involved with the work creation includes:
 - 2.1.1 National artists;
 - 2.1.2 Professional Thai dance masters and guest teachers at the Buditpatanasilpa Institute;
 - 2.1.3 Music composer;
 - 2.1.4 Graduate students at the Buditpatansilpa Institute who are also the creators of the piece.
- 2.2 The study of the steps of the creation process includes:
 - 2.2.1 Create the concept of the performance;
 - 2.2.2 Create a melody and music to include in the performance;
 - 2.2.3 Cast the performers;
 - 2.2.4 Create the choreography;
 - 2.2.5 Design the accessories, the costumes and the jewelry;
 - 2.2.6 Present the dance creation to the professional dance masters, the experts and the members of the Faculty of Arts and Music;
 - 2.2.7 Promote the performance to the public.
3. The methods to keep a record of the choreography are as follow:
 - 3.1 Record the dance movements by writing description and pictures;
 - 3.2 Record a series of video of the performance *Sakkarathewarat*.
4. Present the dance creation to a focus group composed of experts from inside and outside of the Buditpatanasilpa Institute to verify the exactitude of the data. Here are the criteria for the expert selection:
 - 4.1 Be a person who has experience with the Thai dramatic arts for at least 40 years.
 - 4.2 Be a person who has knowledge and has been involved with the creation of new Thai dance performances.
5. The results of the research from interviews, meetings and the focus group has been analyzed and summarized in the research.

TRANSCRIPT

The objectives of the research about the creative process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* are to study the creative process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* and to keep a record of the acquired knowledge about Thai dramatic arts. The inspiration for this piece comes from the story of the royal ceremonies during the Ayutthaya period, when there was a belief that the king had divine origins and that he was compared to the god Phra Inn, the mightiest god in heaven. It gave us the idea to create the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* in order to show our highest respect, our loyalty and our gratefulness to His majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej, beloved king of the people. Throughout his reign, the king has been a tireless worker to help his land and its people to evolve and have a better future. Thai people have been lucky to live in this country under the care of their beloved king. Therefore, we created this Thai dance piece inspired by the study of royal ceremonies, sculptures, paintings, literature, entertainments, dance movements from various forms of shows and the creation of performances. We can summarize the creative process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* in 7 steps, which are:

Step 1: The conception and the creation of the performance are based on information from documents, ancient books and interviews, which have been summarized into the framework of the performance creation.

Step 2: The creation of the melody and music to perform for the show focuses on the mood, which would give a sense of sacredness and greatness. It begins with a slow tempo to gradually accelerate through the performance and to abruptly stop to get a quiet and calm atmosphere. The music composer has used the creators of the show's and his imagination to define which emotions emanate from the melody. In the performance, we can distinguish those emotions:

1. A sense of respect and faith in the royal crown. The creators felt the greatness of the king of Thailand and of the royal rituals.
2. The dance movements, which follow the melody, make us feel calm and peaceful in order to pay respect to the king.
3. The mood of the music conveys a sense of greatness for the royal rituals with faith and respect to the king of Thailand. The music inspires enthusiasm.

Step 3: The selection of the dancers who have knowledge and ability to perform Thai dramatic arts. We had to consider the shape of the faces, which have to fit with the "siraphon" style headdresses. It was determined that the 8 performers would be divided into 2: 4 men and 4 women. They would need to have the following characteristics:

1. The female dancers need to have an oval shape face, which would look nice with the "siraphon" headdress. The male dancers need to have a strong jaw line, which looks like the images of the male sculpture from the Ayutthaya period. All the performers should have proportioned body with similar upper body shape. The male dancers should be taller than the female dancers.
2. They need to be able to gracefully execute Thai classical dance movements.
3. They show patience and perseverance during strict rehearsal schedule.
4. They have discipline, are punctual and have good and easy relationship with the rest of the team.

Step 4: The creation of the choreography uses the basic Thai classical dance movements. The creators also found inspiration on the murals of the temples from the Ayutthaya period and the drawings from ancient books showing the dance postures of the "maebot yai", "pleng cha pleng reo", which are prototypes that deploy a wide variety of dance movement variations with various rhythms. The choreography of the show conveys different meanings, which can be divided into 3 phases:

Phase 1: Ritual to pay respect to his majesty the king.

Phase 2: Devotion to Buddhist faith, which enters people's soul.

Phase 3: Moment to pay respect and to show loyalty. It conveys a sense of grace and greatness of the Thai kingdom. The choreography at this moment is important since it shows the dance postures from the "maebot yai" and "pleng cha pleng reo".

In the concept of the performance, we can find important key dance movements, which come from images in ancient books written during the reign of the king Chulalongkorn the Great also known as Rama I, the first king of the Rattanakosin period. The images of the dance postures are painted in gold. It displays the dance postures from the "maebot yai" and "pleng cha pleng reo".

Dance posture1



original image: Maebot dance: Thepranom posture



1st phase of the choreography: Ritual to pay respect to his majesty the king.
Source: from the literature and history department 2549: 106

Dance posture 2



Original image: Maebot dance: Yugfonhaang posture



2nd phase of the choreography: Devotion to Buddhist faith, which enters people's soul.
Source: from the literature and history department 2549: 131

Dance posture 3



original image: Maebot dance: Phraramkongson posture



original image: Maebot dance: Jorpleungkan posture




3rd phase of the choreography: Moment to pay respect and to show loyalty. It conveys a sense of grace and greatness of the Thai kingdom

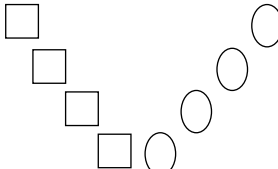
Source: from the literature and history department 2549: 112, 113

The blocking on stage and the way to deploy the dancers are done in a way to use the space both in a balanced and an unbalanced linear display. The center of the stage is used in various angles. The blocking of the performers and the dance positions are designed to be the same at the beginning and at the end of the performance causing the audience to feel faith in the gods and in the traditions of worshipping.

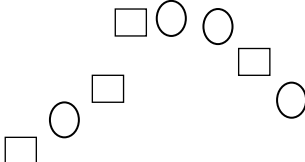
Symbols: □ male dancers, ○ female dancers

Floor pattern	description of the alignment
	Single row parallel to the audience

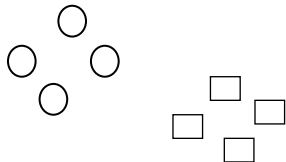
Blocking 1 : Single row parallel to the audience

Floor pattern	description of the alignment
	V shape line as found in Thai traditional dance performances

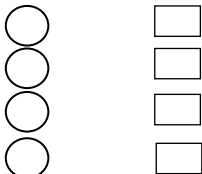
Blocking 2 : V shape line

Floor pattern	description of the alignment
	Balanced display of performers with 2 equal sides composed of 2 couples. Even if the 2 sides are arranged differently, they are still balanced.

Blocking 3 : Balanced and unbalanced lines

Floor pattern	description of the alignment
	Deployment divided into 2 groups, one composed of men and the other of women. One is placed in the front and the other in the back of the stage.

Blocking 4 : Group alignment

Floor pattern	description of the alignment
	Double row perpendicular to the audience placed in the center.

Blocking 5 : Double row perpendicular to the audience placed in the center.

Step 5: The design of the accessories, jewelry, costumes and “siraphon” headdresses is using materials to imitate and to resemble the ancient “siraphon” style found during the Ayutthaya period. The male performers need to look like the god sculptures and painting found during the middle period of Ayutthaya. The style of their costumes is also inspired by the “nohra” costume found in the pictures of ancient books. We use a piece of fabric to tie the waist, which hangs side by side with another piece of fabric placed in the center front as it is commonly worn in the costumes of Thai classical

dance. The female performers wear a costume, which imitates the one of the female dancer images found in the ancient painting. The design of the fabric as for the jewelry and accessories imitates the style found on Buddha images during the Ayutthaya period. About the colors used for the accessories and the costumes, we used colors, which look old and ancient that is close to the brick's color of the ancient city walls. Therefore, we chose to use fabric with Thai traditional patterns in the shade of a dark crimson red color.

The costumes are designed according to the Ayutthaya period.



Picture 4 : Sakkarathewarat costumes

Step 6: Present the creation to the professional Thai dance masters / experts / teachers.

Step 7: Promote the show to the public both in the country and internationally.

In the concept of the performance, we can find important key dance movements, which come from images in ancient books written during the reign of the king Chulalongkorn the Great also known as Rama I, the first king of the Rattanakosin period. The images of the dance postures are painted in gold. It displays the dance postures from the “maebot yai” and “pleng cha pleng reo”.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The study concluded the 3 issues discussed below:

1. The creative process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* found that the prototype of the creation process is divided into 7 steps: 1) The creation of the concept; 2) the creation of the music and melody to play for the performance; 3) the casting of the performers; 4) the design of the choreography and of the blocking on stage; 5) the “siraphon” design of the costumes, headdresses and accessories; 6) the presentation to the professional Thai dance masters, experts and faculty members; 7) the promotion of the performance to the public. The division of the creative process into 7 steps is consistent with the conclusion of Mr. Thammarat Thosakun (2543). The study of the methods and forms of the creative process of other recognized dance creators found out that the steps of the work process are: to think about the subject, to find information about the creative process, to customize the style, to compose the music, to select the performers, to create the dance movements, to design the costumes and to design the setting and lighting. This division of work is also in accordance with Mr. Wiphaphon Faypia (2557), even though

there are some steps, which are put in a different order from the prototype of the creative process of the new Thai northeastern folk dance, which is rather designed as follow:

The 6 steps are: the concept, the style, the performance, the music composition, the costume design, the dance movement creation, the selection of the performers and the rehearsals.

2. The result of the creative process for the choreography shows that the creators have creativity for dance movements inspired by ancient drawn pictures and paintings inherited from the Ayutthaya period combined with an execution of movements, which divides the performance in different parts. It is consistent with the prototype of the creative process of Thai dramatic art performances of Mr. Surapong Virulrak (2549), who discusses the many forms of Thai dramatic arts performances and their various approaches. For instance, one of those is to take an original structure, which features certain traditional techniques or gestures, and to seek new ways for the conception of the created performance. It is also in accordance with the conception of the teacher Suwannee Chalanukhro as reported in the study of Mr. Natthanan Janninwong (2557) who says that the teacher Suwannee Chalanukhro's idea to design new creations from his experience in performances is inspired by design principals, which can be divided into 4 aspects: 1) the imagination; 2) the mixture of everyday life movements or gestures; 3) the creation of a new choreography; 4) the standard dance movement routines, which are taken from basic Thai dances or foreign choreographies, but with a different execution and movement identity.

3. The result of the design of the blocking on stage shows that there are 5 forms of alignment, which are: a line parallel to the audience, lines in diagonal, balanced and unbalanced display, a group disposition and, finally, lines perpendicular to the audience. Those designs are based on the use of space and on the direction in which the performers move from one point to another. There is also a connection with the people watching. In theory, the movements should be presented toward the audience to make it more interesting and to inspire a feeling of greatness. When the performers move away from the audience, it conveys a feeling of emptiness, loss, terror and/or hesitation. With the performers displayed in a row parallel to the audience, we can follow all the performers equally and admire their synchronized movements. When, they gradually transition to a diagonal display, we can enjoy the gracefulness of the movement by following their change of deployment. When the performers stand straight and high, it shows elegance and grandeur. On the opposite, when they are in a lower position, it gives a feeling of fear, humility or impairment (Surapon Wirulrak 2549). Moreover, the design of the alignment on stage is using the traditional alignment found in Thai classical dance performances as reported by the dance master Jamriang Phutpradab (Phayrot Thongkhamsuk 2547), who says that the performers alignment positions such as in lines parallel or perpendicular to the audience, lines in diagonal, single or double row show a pattern with the study of the technique and the form of the choreographic creation, which has been previously invented and commonly accepted by Thai dance masters.

There is a study about the form and the creative process of the undergraduate students in the Faculty of Dance at Chulalongkorn University during the year 2534-2541 (1991-1998) (Thammarat Thowasekun 2543) that found out that the form of the new Thai dance creations are in accordance with the traditional style of the Thai dramatic arts. They apply the style of the Thai dance movements of the "mae bot" or they go in another direction where they mix together the western dance style with the Thai style. The design of the row alignment, the geometry of the figures and the shape of the lines are used to convey a philosophical meaning to the blocking on stage.

FEEDBACK FROM THE RESEARCH

1. The study of the creative process of the Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* has been done not only to preserve the acquired knowledge about Thai dramatic arts, but also to show a possible way to create other future performances. The important elements about the creative process of new Thai dance performances include to have knowledge about music and the various melodies, to have knowledge and skills about costume design, to understand the different moods involved in a performance, to have a good aesthetic judgment and to be aware that creative Thai dramatic arts performances can be improved or adjusted, aren't fix and can evolve. It is possible to say that new Thai dramatic arts performances are comprehensible, have a philosophical content, a story, meaning, dance movements, blocking techniques, solo or group form, music and melody, costumes and accessories. The creators of a performance need to have a clear objective so that it results into a perfect creation.

2. The Thai neo-traditional dance performance *Sakkarathewarat* clearly differs from other new Thai dramatic arts performances by using dance movements form the basic Thai dance movement routine. It means that it was inspired by ancient drawn pictures and by pictures found in books in order to design the positions in the choreography such as the way to curve the arms or the way to position the feet, which mimic the selected images. Therefore, the shape of the dancers' body is positioned differently from the typical positioning found nowadays. We can also think about the various stage alignments of the performers and the breathing techniques and dance movements, which are inspired by international approaches. There is also a row alignment, which is different from traditional Thai dramatic arts performances, that is the unbalanced line display. It adds an interesting novelty to the piece.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT

In the field of Thai dramatic arts, it is possible to study and to do more research about the preserved past Thai dance performances and about the new dance creations. For the latter, there should be more study about the creative process of the new Thai folk dance performances, which are inspired by the local way of life so that the knowledge from the local people is preserved and can be studied in the future. The new Thai folk dance performances, which have been promoted in the past and are generally known depending of their region of origin, are:

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