



Thai Dance : The Synthesis of Knowledge From Thai Dance Thesis

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze and synthesize the characters of theses on Thai dance, which involves 79 Master's theses of Chulalongkorn University, published during 1995 - 2006.

The study divided into two parts : first, the analysis of the characters, including the length, the types, the subject, the content, the case, the data collection, the data analysis, and the usefulness of the study; secondly, the synthesis of the findings of the study according to the Krippendorff theory and the outcomes are classified by Uthumporn Jamornman's method of content analysis. The majority of theses involving Thai classical dance are descriptive, focusing on 'Rum', solo or group dance of Thai classical music. At present, Thai classical dance includes 1. Traditional court dance, 2. Adapted court dance, 3. Traditional folk dance, 4. Modern folk dance, and 5. Contemporary Thai dance which adopts old styles and gives them a novel interpretation.

Keywords : Analysis, The body of knowledge of Thai classical dance

Introduction

The study of the theses involving Thai classical dance has derived from the realization of the importance of these theses as reliable sources of knowledge systematically gained from scientific methods. These theses are the bank of data collected from documented Thai history and interviews with experts on Thai classical dance whose knowledge has been inherited and crystallized as an invaluable source of primary knowledge.

These theses are also sources of knowledge gained from the studies of the performances performed by veteran performers, Thai national artists and apprentices and their protégés.

Due to, firstly, the lack of the connection between the issues studied and, secondly, the increase of the study involving Thai classical dance resulted from the promotion of individual and institutional research. Without the full perspective of all the characteristics of the research as a

guideline for new researchers and government agencies promoting research, the synthesis of the existing work is one of the methods that provide a full perspective of all aspects of Thai classical dance. References will be provided to the agencies tasked with the mission to the financial support and the strategic planning for thesis topics in educational institutions offering graduate programs in Thai classical dance.

Aims

1. To analyze the characteristics of the theses involving Thai dance
2. To synthesize the body of knowledge of Thai dance

Scope and Methodology

The research subjects are the 79 Master's theses of Thai classical dance major, Chulalongkorn University, 1995 - 2006.

This is a qualitative synthesis and through the content, the researcher will analyze how to assess the body of knowledge and quantitatively analyze the characteristics of the information. The scope of the study is:

1. Time of the research
2. The types of the research
3. The research subjects
4. The types of the research content
5. The points to research/study
6. The data collecting
7. The data analysis
8. The value/usefulness of the research

The synthesis of these findings is performed using the Krippendorff's theory which categorizes the research content into:

1. The types of Thai classical dance
2. The formats of Thai classical dance
3. The components of Thai classical dance

The results are divided into 2 parts. Firstly, the analysis of the characteristics of the research was categorized according to the general conditions and the research regulations. The issues studied were categorized according to the principles of Thai classical dance. The results of this qualitative research are presented in figures, the frequency and the percentage, according to the content and factors.

Secondly, the synthesis of the findings of the study, using Krippendorff's theory, is classified according to Uthumporn Jamornman's method of content analysis.

Results

Part I.

The full perspective of the theses involving Thai dances resulted from the quantitative analysis that shows the research subjects are mostly descriptive research, which is consist the characters of the art theses classified as the qualitative research, on dance. The interests of the study derived from:

1. The trend of the thesis topic studied according to curriculum of Chulalongkorn University
2. The interests of each researcher, base on their expertise us the common character of Thai dancers who are skillful at particular dances or would like to preserve the work of their teachers or the performances they admire most.
3. The realization of the importance to preserve national heritage because the experts who own the body of knowledge have passed away. In order to avoid losing our dance heritage , we urgently need to gather data on these bodies of knowledge.

There are 87.34 % of theses involving Thai dance are descriptive research, consist of majority of art theses, which are descriptive research focusing on the description of the processes and elements of the studied subjects.

About 84.81 % of the research subjects are performances of various types of Thai performing arts. Such as, the studies of the dance movements in 'Khon', 'Rum Klom' in 'Khon', and 'Long Slong Tone' in 'I-Nao'.

35.44 % of the studies are the studies of adapted Thai dance, including folk and court dance. In fact, there are large numbers of studies in adapted Thai dance because adapted Thai dance is new and there are few written documents or texts on the backgrounds and theories. Consequently, data collection and analysis have been done to show the development of Thai dance in each era.

40.54 % of the topics studied involve the elements of the performance including performances, methods, and procedures. 31.35 % focused on background and detail of the content of their studies. The analysis of the elements of the performance and the background studies yield the understanding of the context of each performance and better access to the elements of the performance.

26.24 % of the data collection was taken from the written documents and interviews, which are consistent with the researcher's expectation that the field's knowledge belongs to artists, experts and mentors. Should the researcher desire to acquire this profound knowledge, the researcher must personally interview them.

On the usefulness of the studies, 40.24 % found that the preservation of Thai dance was useful. 33.53 % acknowledged the significance of the body of knowledge on Thai dance as an

important part of their cultural heritage. Those of us in the field realized that it is necessary to preserve Thai dance, particularly, when foreign cultures are easily accessible and the Thai lifestyle has gradually changed. There are rare chances for Thai dancers to perform anywhere. The economy and consumer trends have also affected the place of Thai dance, resulting in the deviation from the principles of the original art.

Part II

The synthesis of the theses involving Thai dance: classical dance and folk dance shows that: at present, classical dance and folk dance include traditional court style, adapted court style, traditional folk style and adapted folk style, as well as, contemporary Thai dance which is derived from the classical but avoids repetition and traditional patterns. However, contemporary Thai dance adopts old styles and gives them a novel interpretation.

The researcher has divided dance into two categories: traditional and adapted, using the time when the traditional royal Thai dance department under the patronage of the King was transferred to the Fine Arts department. Several new dances were created with the new purposes of pure entertainment for the bureaucrats and showing the delicate refinement of the music, movements, and costume with no concern with time, budget, or financial viability when these new dances and styles are transferred to the Fine Arts Department, who have adapted the performance, under the Royal patronage, to represent a well-established nation's rich culture. The learning process is arranged in such a way that it has an impact on both the performer's style and separate criteria for measuring beauty. Thus, the performance depends more on an

imitation of the original, than the artist's skill or abilities.

The modern folk dance can be easily distinguished from standard dances since the court style has influenced on the posture. This is the result of the original posture being revived before it vanished.

The term 'Thai dance' in these theses includes the court style, regional dances, and the folk dances of the various tribes living in Thailand. Since Thailand consist of diverse society, studying the cultures of different ethnic yields better understanding and promotes good relation among tribes living together. All cultures studied in these theses enhance the understanding of those tribes through the characters of the arts.

In order to study the court style, basic training before being selected by the masters for further training, as a main character or a solo dancer, is required. The dancer is trained to demonstrate the elegance and gracefulness of the dance and his/her abilities as a dancer. In addition to the movement training, these dancers are also trained to control their facial expression to express certain moods or emotional states. This is much different to traditional dance which express emotion with subtlety. This is evidence of the shift in the sense of beauty from the traditional court style to contemporary dance.

The most popular performances consist of several aspects including: costumes, music lyrics, and complex movements.

The body of knowledge of folk, regional and tribal Thai dance, originated for numerous reasons:

1. For religious worship and to worship sacred images: guardian spirits, ancestor spirits, or deities.
2. To entertain people with high status
3. For the relaxation of the working class
4. To show the royalty and entertain the King and aristocracy
5. To promote ethics, patriotism, national culture, and tourism in accordance with the government policy
6. To show the capability of the artisans, especially those who recreate or adapt original shows to enhance prominent points of the dance. This can be seen as both an aesthetic experience and as a business strategy.

The development of the performance has been divided into 4 periods:

1. Performances for worshipping and entertaining according to the government policies
2. New shows arising from the adaptation of the old popular shows
3. New shows inspired by social situations and newly found social contexts
4. Revivals of selected historical performances

The successful preservation of the performing arts depends on the strength of each cultural group, as well as the financial support and the acknowledgement of local government agencies. The most influential factor is current government policy, whether it recognizes the performing arts as part of our national cultural identity and an activities that can generate income from tourism.

The unique characteristic of Thai folk dances is relaxed movement use more natural movement, no stiff rhythms and a relaxation of the rigid standard of Thai dance. This type of movement involves notstressing the fingers and the hand movements and do not have the unnaturally bent as in classical Thai dance.

Dances performed by the folk also worship spirits, the dance not only entertains, but also cures mental illness. The dance is a way to diagnose and treat symptoms.

According to these studies, the dances of different ethnic groups in Thailand has learned and borrowed from neighbouring countries and cultures. These folk dances tend to imitate nature, animals, and various ways of life. These movements found in both dances of worship and dances for entertainment.

Thai dances have been brought into business as a strategy to enhance Thai restaurants business to attract, foreign customers. The focus of Thai dances performance in the restaurant is not on its authenticity, but more on the variety and colourful of the performances. These performances also tend to be short to enable them to showcase variety of different dance style. Although these dancers meant for business but it helps to raise awareness of our national culture heritage same as private Thai dance schools do. They are also try to use the unique qualities of Thai dance and it could attract foreigners of it exotic qualities. Mean while, for students of Thai dance schools allow them to develop new forms within the limits of Thai dance. The school founders are the ones who know and care for Thai classical dance and music with a lot of supporters.

The theses show that 'Khon', a type of Thai classical performances known as a mask dance, started from popular beliefs and customs. Firstly, the performers were selected to be trained for the basic movements and then they will be assigned to practice particular roles in the Ramayana epic.

The characters in 'Khon' include the protagonist, and antagonists in the form of giants, a leading lady, and soldiers in form of monkeys.

The giants represent all possible genders, male, female and transgendered. The performers have to go through the same training to search for their own identity and style.

Basices training, the performer of Prince Rama, the hero character in the Ramayana epic, must be skillful in various types of dances: 'Rum cha pi', 'Pleng na part bath sakulnee', 'Cherd ching son toranong', 'Tra banthom pri', 'Rum trod pol', 'Karn lop', 'Karn kun loy' and 'Karn rum tee bot'.

It is a common practice of performers who perform the Demon King of the Lanka City in Ramayana to be skillful in 'Rum cha pi', 'Rum trod pol', 'Rum tee bot', 'Rum nar part samer marn', 'Rum tra nee mit', 'Rum Brahman kao', and 'Rum Brahman oak'. The performers must understand the entire process of field fighting. The important episodes of performances are 'Nang Loy' and 'Chu Klong Duang Jai'. The dance movements in 'Khon' have been influenced by the performance of 'Lakorn Nai', royal dance, or 'Khon Rong Nai'.

The dance of the Monkey King of the Ramayana epic includes a warrior dance and a marching dance. These dances have been drawn from the war strategies of ancient Thai kings. This adds the value to the dance beyond the artistry of the dancers as it tells the long history of the kingdom of Thailand.

The 'Khon' performances organized by the Fine Arts Department can nourish new performers and provide entertainment for their audience.

In 'Khon' studies, several people who have contributed to 'Khon' were mentioned: His Majesty the King and the Royal families as playwrights and organizers; courtiers as supporters of the advancement of the play and commoners who established the 'Khon' companies, cultivated

great performers. For example, Master Thongream Mongkonnat, Master Yat Changthong, Master Rapop Pothivej, and Master Chatuporn Rattanawaraha.

The theses show that there are four types of Thai plays: traditional court dance, adapted court dance, traditional folk dance, and modern folk dance. It is found that:

1. The movements of the court dance are currently recognized as standard dances. The performance of these dances requires balance, rhythm of the breath, the continuity of movement, strength in the muscles to form graceful and solemn postures, since most of the stories involve the monarchy, as well as the relaxation of the muscles for the smoothness in a required series of dance movements.

2. The process of 'Lakorn Nai' consists of the selection, the basic training, the practice of the specific roles: the protagonist, antagonists, leading ladies, and transvestites.

The overture consists of short plays and sets of dances to pay respect to the teachers, to ensure their success and to ward off evil.

The 'Nar Part' dance is to show different movements of the principal dances in different contexts. There might be additional dances for specific events; for instance, 'Rum cherd ching' in a hunting and traveling dance. However, the principal movements are the same.

The solo dance of each main character in different performances: 'Rum long slong tone', 'Sword dance', and 'Rum don sa bear hlar' often weaves contemporary cultures into the dance. For example, the bathing dance is derived from the Royal bath ceremony.

It is a common practice in a courting dance for the male lead to approach the leading lady from the left.

The knowledge has been transferred from the Royal court of the Rattanakosin period to the Fine Arts Department by the masters who once performed in the plays of Chao Jom Manda Aim, Prince Singhanatrachadurongrit, Kromlaung Phuwante Narinrit, Saun Kularb Palace's play under the patronage of HH Highness Prince Aksadangdechawut, Baan Mor Palace of HH Highness Prince Thavejwongwewat, Chao Khun Pra Prayulwong, Petchboon Palace of HH Highness Chuthatucharaderok, and Chao Pra Ya Mahenthorasakthamrong. These performers were trained by Master Lamun Yamakup, Lady Paew Sanitwongsenee, and Master Chaley Sukawanich.

3. The influential figures in the court performance are: His Majesty the King and the aristocrats, who are the main supporters and revivers of the lost arts.

The members of Theater company who introduced different movements to the Fine Arts Department, particularly, Saun Kularb palace Theater company as the first company which was transferred to the College of the Dramatic Arts and the last group of the Theater companies working under the Fine Arts Department.

4. The influential figures in the adapted court performance are: H.S.H. Princess Laksamilawan, H.R.H. Princess Chalermkatemongkol, Luang Wichit-Vadakarn, H.M. King Rama VII, Lamul Yamakup, Thanpuying Paew Sanithwongseni, Sompop Chantharapapa, and Seree Wangnaitham.

Traditional and modern folk plays

1. Folk plays are strongly influenced by superstitious beliefs. It can be seen in the overture dance, basic training, paying-respect-to-teacher ceremony, and all annual ceremonies.

2. The studies of 'Chatree' plays performed in Petchaburi province, Ayuthaya province, Chanthaburi province, and Bangkok metropolitan show that there are differences in details but what remains the same are: the main structure, the sequence of the performance, and the beliefs in rites and ceremonies.
3. 'Nora' performance is the performance organized by the public and by schools. It is the performance for ceremonies and entertainment. The sequence of the performance is similar starting with paying-respect-to-teacher ceremony. Some call 'Nora,' 'Rum' and others call it 'Rabum' depending on each the boundaries of each discipline.
4. The studies of 'Mayong' performance by Thai Muslims in the Southern border provinces shows that it is very similar to 'Nora' by Thai Buddhists. The local dialect, Malayu, is used in 'Mayong'. The old beliefs, for example, a belief in superstition, spirits, and offerings to them, are also found in 'Mayong'.
5. 'Mohlam kok kha khao' is a performance that differentiates itself from 'Mohlam moo,' the traditional Eastern folk performance by including Western costumes. Initially, it was not accepted by female audiences since the costumes are too revealing. However, there is no evidence of any 'Mohlam kok kha khao' performances lately.

The theses on traditional Thai recreation divided the games into two types: court recreation and folk recreation. The court recreations are ceremonial performances which are performed in

royal ceremonies. The significant court recreations are 'Mong klum', 'Ra beng', 'Ku lar tee mai', 'Tang wee sai', and 'Kra aw tang kwai'. These recreations are strongly influenced by neighboring cultures. Since there are currently few royal ceremonies performances, these plays are no longer produced.

Folk recreations, in particular, the famous shadow plays of Kanon and Sawangarrom temples, derived from the Buddhist beliefs of private company owners who shared both the equipment and their knowledge with others. Later on, these companies received support from government agencies.

Another folk recreation is a puppet show. At present, there are 15 puppet companies: the Chuchertchamnansil company of Samutsakorn province is one of the best-known companies and has an important role in the preservation of Thai culture as they have opened a puppetry school. Puppet shows were originally to earn money, but now are performed for reasons of cultural conservation only.

Discussion

1. The characteristics of the theses involving Thai classical performances

It is found that historical studies are needed to enhance the credibility of the body of knowledge of Thai dance. Thesis committees should include experts in history, language and literature, and the study programs should offer courses in the related fields.

Most of the theses are basic research, and there are very few applicable studies which have social or economical benefits. There should be more support for such research.

2. The key persons in promoting Thai classical dance

The responsible authorities are the most significant groups to support Thai classical dance along with private organizations, classical dance schools, and restaurant owners.

Collaboration between the government and the private sector should be established. The government should assist with issues of authenticity while the private sector could promote Thai dance to encourage tourism and image of the country. The government could publicly recognize or provide a tax-exempt status for these private organizations as an incentive for these groups to continue to promoting their national heritage.

3. The role of Thai classical dance in

society

In addition to its function as an entertainment activity, Thai classical dance also as a cure for mental illness and violent behavior in the society, a tool for tourism promotion, a channel for self expression, and a mirror to reflect the actual conditions of economy, religion and society.

If the synthesis of the body of knowledge received from the classical dance studies is genuinely supported, this is the best use of Thai dance. For example, studies of different groups living in Thailand will enhance the understanding of different cultures, resulting in fewer conflicts and greater harmony.

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