

THE INFLUENCE OF LOPBURI ARTS ON THAI MUSIC AND DANCE

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the influence of Lopburi arts on Thai music and dance. The scope of this study focuses on the application of Lopburi arts to the invention of choreography, costumes, accessories, rhythm, lyrics, and the use of musical instruments in “Prang Sam Yod Dance”.

The data were collected through the study of documents relating to Lopburi arts history, the historical evidences of Lopburi arts found in Lopburi, and in-depth interviews by the local scholars.

The research finding reveal that:

1. The rhythm used in “Prang Sam Yod Dance” was influenced by the song” Khmer’s Whistle Blow” with the authentic Khmer music beat. The lyrics were written and based on the ancient scripts as found at Lopburi ancient shrines built during B.E. 15 and 16. The musical instruments used to play in this song are the musical instruments culturally shared and used in Southeast Asia.

2. The invention of costumes, accessories, hairstyles, and choreography in “Prang Sam Yod Dance” was also influenced by Lopburi arts, particularly from the documents and artifacts displayed at Lopburi National Museum. (Total 189 words)

Keywords: 1. Lopburi arts 2. Thai classical music and dance 3. Influence 4. Prang Sam Yod Dance

1. Introduction

Lopburi, a city situated in the Chao Phya River basin in the central region of Thailand, has been one of the Kingdom’s most important cities since the ancient time. It was the center of the Kingdom in the 12th B.E. and many of the Dhavaravati artifacts were unearthed there. During the 15th and 16th B.E. Lopburi flourished as the political and cultural hub as mentioned in the ancient Khmer and Chinese inscriptions.

It was not until the 16th and 18th B.E. that Lopburi art emerged and it was much influenced by the Khmer art. It is the Khmer art in conception due to the Khmer domination over the region during that time (Diskul, 1971, Sukhasvasti, 1995, Saraya, 2005, Leksukhum, 2014). It can be said that Lopburi art is quite similar to the Khmer art of Cambodia.

Lopburiart objects and architecture found in Thailand were created by local Thai craftsmen. Lopburi art was characterized by the modified Khmer art forms and patterns combined with Pagan art of Burma. This made Lopburi art unique and it was primarily used to serve religious purposes. That is why the traces of Lopburi art can be seen in many of ancient religious places in Lopburi such as Prang Sam Yod (The Three-Crest Pagoda), Prang Khaek (The Idian Pagoda), or Prang Wat Mahathat (The Pagoda of Mahathat Temple).

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Interestingly, Lopburi art did not only influence the design and construction of religious places but it also influenced other aspects of Thai cultural life such as Thai dance and music. A number of Thai dances were clearly influenced by Lopburi art, particularly those invented in the region.

Regarding Thai choreography, Benjakarn (1997) pointed out that Thai basic choreography was influenced by the deities' choreography as found in archeological evidences. Additionally, by comparing the choreography portrayed in the Khmer-style sculpture named "*Dancing Shiva*" found in Northeastern Thailand and Lopburi-style choreography, Khempila (1996) pointed out that Lopburi-style choreography was mainly influenced by the "*Dancing Shiva*" choreography. Aimsakul (2011) concluded that Thai choreography was influenced and inherited from Dhavaravati, Indian, and Ancient Khmer cultures. As for the music, the use of musical instruments in the Southeast Asian region was influenced by the culture shared and inherited among the people living in the region (Thongnoi, 2012).



Picture 1
"Dancing Shiva" Sculpture
Source: Sukhasvasti, 1995, page 337

2. Research Design and Methodology

This research aims to study the influence of Lopburi art on the invention of "*Prang samYod Dance*" by the 4th year undergraduate students of Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts in 2011. The Dance was invented to help promote Lopburi's historical attractions and at the same time it served as the requirement to fulfil their completion of the program.

The research hypothesized that the invention of the dance was influenced by Lopburi arts regarding the following elements: choreography, costumes, accessories, melody, lyrics, and the use of musical instruments. Primary research work on Lopburi art was conducted

through the study of archeological sites and artifacts, particularly the decorative patterns and bas-reliefs on Prang Sam Yod as well as the Buddha images and statues of gods and goddesses housed at King Narai's National Museum.



Picture 2

Hairstyle, Costumes, and Accessories Influenced by Bapuan Art of Cambodia in the 16th B.E.
 Source: King Narai's National Museum, Lopburi, 6 February 2015

The research design was qualitative and based on the theoretical framework on art history and archeological evidences. The data used in this study were collected through documentary analysis relating to Lopburi art history and interview by one Thai historian, 2 music scholars, and one Thai dance expert. The collected data were then analyzed and concluded to show how Lopburi art influenced the invention of “*Prang Sam Yod Dance*” regarding choreography, costumes, accessories, rhythm, lyrics, and the use of musical instruments.

3. Research Findings

This section discusses the research findings focusing on the influence of Lopburi art on the invention of “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” regarding melody, lyrics, musical instruments, choreography, costumes, and accessories.

3.1 The Influence of Lopburi Art on Melody

According to the interview with 2 music scholars: Mr. NarongritKhongpin and Mr. SomchaiFonramdee, the melody used in “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” was composed by adopting the melody of the old Khmer song “*Khmer Whistling the Leaf*” or in Thai “*Khmer PaoBaimai*.”

In so doing, this will reflect the long history of Lopburi with a strong influence of Indian and Khmer cultures over the region, both culturally and politically. Under the king's patronage, Lopburi art was flourished and extended into various aspects of people's life, not only in religions but also in music and dance. During the 12th to 19th B.E., Thai music and dance were either directly or indirectly influenced by Indian and Khmer cultures.

3.2The Influence of Lopburi Art on Lyrics

According to the interview with 2 music scholars: Mr. NarongritKhongpin and Mr. SomchaiFonramdee, the lyrics used in “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” was composed in

accordance with the form of Thai Octameter Poem, describing the dance performed by angels to pay homage to the god and other sacred objects housed at Pra Prang Sam Yod.

The concept of the song lyrics was also in accordance with the ancient stone inscription found at Lopburi's Supreme Shrine, dating back to the 15th and 16th B.E. Part of the inscription mentioned that the dance and the song performed by these angels were sacrificed to Hermit Wasuthep who was the Town God of Lopburi. Thus, it can be said that Thai music and dance was clearly influenced by Khmer and Indian cultures.

3.3 The Influence of Lopburi Art on Musical Instruments

According to the interview with 2 music scholars: Mr. Narongrit Khongpin and Mr. Somchai Fonramdee, the musical instruments used in “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” were ‘*ranat*’ (trough-resonated keyboard percussion instrument; generally played with two mallets), ‘*gong*’, ‘*oboe*’, ‘*rammana*’ (frame drum; played with the hand), and ‘*saw samsai*’ (three-string spike fiddle with coconut shell body). The use of these traditional Thai musical instruments were also in accordance with those musical instruments widely played in the Southeast Asian region where the culture was descended and shared among the peoples. Thus, it can be said that traditional Thai musical instruments were much influenced by Khmer, Indian, and Chinese cultures.



Picture 3
Bas-Relief Portraying the Musical Performance with Lute, Oboe,
Cymbals, and Four-String Lute
Source: Sukhasvasti, 1995, page 337

3.4 The Influence of Lopburi Art on Costumes and Accessories Design

The costumes, accessories, and hairstyle designed for “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” were mainly influenced by Lopburi art as evidenced by the artifacts housed at King Narai's National Museum including the Buddha images, statues of gods and goddesses as well as the decorative patterns found at the religious places in Lopburi.



Picture 4

*The Creation of “Prang Sam Yod Dance” Costumes
Conceptualized by the Archeological Site “Prang Sam Yod”*

*Source: The Creation of “Prang Sam Yod Dance”
Based on the Historical Approach, 2011, p. 79*



Picture5

*The Creation of “Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance” Costumes
Conceptualized by Archeological Artifacts*

*Source: The Creation of “Prang Sam Yod Dance”
Based on the Historical Approach, 2011, p. 67*



Picture 6

The Bayon Art-Style Buddha Image and Stone Statue of Goddess

Source: King Narai's National Museum, 6 February 2015

3.5 The Influence of Lopburi Art on Choreography Design

The creation of the choreography for “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” was conceptualized by Lopburi art as evidenced by the archeological site “*Pra Prang Sam Yod*” and the artifacts housed at King Narai’s National Museum including the Buddha images, statues of gods and goddesses as well as the decorative patterns found at the religious places in Lopburi.

This influence of Lopburi art on the choreography designed for “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” can be explained by the findings of the research work by Benjakarn in 1997. Benjakarn points out that the basic choreography patterns used in Thai classical dance was, to some extent, influenced by the “*Dance of the God*” as portrayed on the bas-relief found at “*Pimai Sand Stone Castle*” in Nakornratchasima, Northeast Thailand.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the creation of “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*” was mainly influenced by Lopburi art in various aspects including choreography, melody, lyrics, costumes, accessories, and hairstyle. The Dance was created to promote Lopburi’s historical attractions and at the same time to serve as the requirement for the undergraduate students of Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts as part of their completion of the program. With the concept based on Lopburi art, the Dance itself is unique and definitely reflects the glory of Lopburi art over the region. Archeological evidences (Lopburi art-style architecture, artifacts, etc.), documentation study relating to Lopburi art, and interview by local historians, music and dance experts were essential in designing and creating this dance.

Lopburi art, at first, was mainly used for religious purposes such as construction of religious places, carvings of Buddha images or sand stone statues of gods and goddesses. Later on the influence of Lopburi art also reflected in other cultural aspects: dance and music. Many of Lopburi art-style artifacts and decorative patterns attached to religious places portrayed the dances performed by gods or goddesses as well as the musical instruments used during that time. These archeological evidences highly inspired the creation of “*Pra Prang Sam Yod Dance*.”

Lopburi art itself was the fruit of many ancient cultures dominating the region during that time, namely Khmer, Indian, Java, or Chinese cultures. With the right combination of

these cultures, Lopburi art became unique and reflected how different cultures melted together in a harmonious way.

5. Suggestions

1. The findings obtained from this research can be applied to other forms of dramatic arts to promote the knowledge of art history through music, dance, or performances.
2. Further study on Lopburi art is also suggested with the aims to develop and promote other historical attractions in Thailand.

6. Acknowledgment

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