

The Essence of Dvaravati and Modern Mon Cultures on the Creation of Lavapura Dance

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

ABSTRACT

This research aimed to study the acculturation of Dvaravati culture on the creation of “Lavapura Dance”. Based on the qualitative research methodology, the data used in this study were collected through document study, and interviews. The results revealed that, firstly, the “Lavapura dance” clearly reflected the acculturation of Dvaravati culture on its dance name. Secondly, the creation of the choreography used in “Lavapura Dance” was influenced by Dvaravati culture applying and combining together the choreography found on Dvaravati sculptures, the choreography specifically designed for “Dvaravati Dance” and the choreography of local Mon dance of Bang Khan Maak subdistrict, Lopburi Province. Thirdly, the costumes for “Lavapura Dance” was designed based on the drawings of Dvaravati ladies and local Mon costumes. Lastly, the music used in “Lavapura Dance” was intentionally composed by combining the essence of Dvaravati and local Mon culture resulting in having Mon melody in Thai music when playing with Mon musical instruments.

Keywords: 1. Acculturation of Dvaravati 2. Lavapura Dance

1. Introduction

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.

According to the Chinese Tung-tien Chronicles recorded in the 14th century, 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).



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

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

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.

The acculturation of Dvaravati culture inspired the staff at Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts 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.

2. Aims of the study

This research aimed to study how 'Lavapura Dance' was created, focusing on the essence of Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures on the dance. The creation process of 'Lavapura Dance' was investigated regarding the history of the dance name, choreography design, costumes design, and musical composition.

3. Methodology

As this study was designed using qualitative approach, its data were collected through documentation study and interviews. 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
 - Mrs. Wattana Kosinanon,, an expert in Thai costumes design, 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 findings can be revealed as follows:

4.1 History of the Dance Name

According to the interview with Mrs. Wattana Kosinanon, of Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts, who gave the name to this dance, it was found the name 'Lavapura Dance' was inspired by the name 'Lavapura' which was inscribed on the silver coins used as currency in the Dvaravati period. During that time, Lopburi was named 'Lavapura'; therefore, the name itself reflects the period when the Dvaravati-Mon culture was flourishing. Another reason is that the college also wanted to promote Lopburi history. 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.

This name was also supported by Mrs. Poonsri Jeebkaew, an expert at Lopburi history during the Dvaravati period, that the name 'Lavapura' could reflect the strong identity of Lopburi as the center of Dvaravati Kingdom.

4.2 Costume Design

The results of the interview with Mrs. Wattana Kosinanon,, a costume designer of 'Lavapura Dance', revealed that the costume design was a combination between Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures. The audiences are able to perceive and appreciate how the old and the new were well blended. Besides, the ultimate goal is to show how the ancient Dvaravati has become alive with a touch of modern Mon through this design.

The designed costumes (hairstyle, accessories, breast wrap, shawl, and skirt or sarong) were then presented to the local wisdom elites (Phra Panyawut and Mr. Sutas Leekpal) and a historical and archeological expert (Ms. Poonsri Jeebkaew) for feedback. The

local wisdom elites and the expert agreed that the design costumes reminded them of the Mon culture with a good combination of both Dvaravati and modern Mon essence.

4.2.1 Design of Hairstyle

The design of the hairstyle for 'Lavapura' Dancers was inspired by the woman's high bun hairstyle with tiara as displayed on Dvaravati sculptures shown in the pictures below.



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, a set of earrings, necklace, and bracelet were designed to be used in 'Lavapura Dance' applying what appears in the sculpture of Dvaravati women demonstrated in the pictures below. Colored beads were used in her design to reflect Dvaravati culture.



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

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

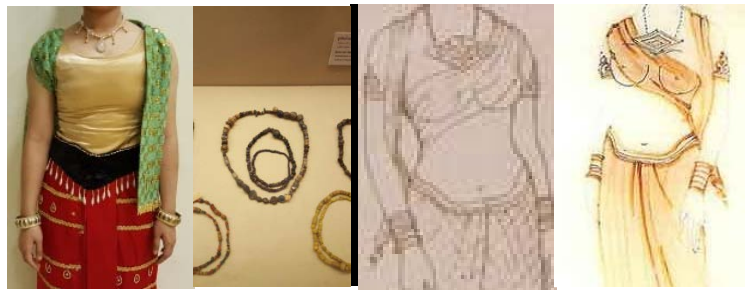


Figure 4: Necklace and Bracelet Worn by Lavapura Dancers; Dvaravati Bead Necklace; Drawing of Dvaravati Women with Necklace and Bracelet

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

4.2.3 Design of Breast Wrap and Shawl

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 shoulder around the breasts and back. Therefore, beige breast wraps were designed 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.



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

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 in Thai costumes design and Thai classical 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

The interview with Mrs. Wattana Kosinanon, a Thai classical dance expert revealed that the choreography design 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. Furthermore, the new choreography reflects the subtleness and politeness of the Mon people.

The two local wisdom elites and the historical and archeological expert were invited to watch ‘Lavapura Dance’ on stage. They all said that they could feel the essence of Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures reflecting through the dance patterns.



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)

4.4 Musical Composition

According to the interview with Mr. Namwa Romphothong, a Thai classical music expert, who composed the music for ‘Lavapura Dance’, it was found that ~~he~~ the musical composition for this dance was inspired by Mon music culture which has been passed from one to another and still been 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). Mr. Namwa also believes that Dvaravati people were Mon, and his belief is strongly supported by the archeological evidence which proves that Dvaravati culture was originated by the Mon people who came into power over the region during the 11th-16th centuries.

The two local wisdom elites and the historical and archeological expert were invited to watch ‘Lavapura Dance’ on stage. They all said that they could feel the essence of Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures reflecting through the music composed by Mr. Namwa Romphothong.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

After analyzing the data concerning the process of 'Lavapura Dance' creation through interviews with the six informants, it can be said that the essence of Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures can be felt all through the show. The two cultures were well blended and reflected through 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.

5.1 The History of the Dance Name

The dance was named 'Lavapura dance' in order to remind the audience of the glorious past of Lopburi, once called 'Lavapura' in the Dvaravati period, and, at the same time, to promote Lopburi's long history and to cherish the Mon people of Bang Khanmak. Lavapura used to be the center of Dvaravati Kingdom, which has been proved by many archeological evidences (Diskul, 1996). One of the archeological artifacts which inspired the team at Lopburi College of Dramatic Arts to name the dance as 'Lavapura' is 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).

5.2 Costume Design

'Lavapura Dance' costumes designer was mainly inspired by both Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures. The high bun hairstyle with tiara was typically worn by Dvaravati women as evidenced by archeological artifacts (sculptures and base-reliefs). This hairstyle 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).

As for the accessories, the designer admitted that Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures were her main inspiration. A set of accessories was specifically designed for the dance, including earrings, a necklace, a bracelet, and a tiara. 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 Dvaravati beads were unearthed in many of the archeological sites in the central region of Thailand (Inthrawut, 1999).

Regarding the costumes used in 'Lavapura Dance', the designer got her inspiration from both Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures which were beautifully blended together. The top part of the costume is a beige breast wrap and a shawl. Dvaravati women were topless and wore breast plates and shawls to cover their naked breasts (Khunsong, 2012). To maximize the essence of Dvaravati look on stage, the dancers wear a beige breast wrap with a shawl hanging on their shoulders. Shawls are still used by modern Mon women. Therefore, the design of the top part reflects both Dvaravati and modern Mon cultures.

Calf length sarongs and waistbands decorated with beads are worn by Lavapura dancers on stage. The design is also inspired from Dvaravati women sculptures and base-reliefs, particularly the sculpture of Camdevi, a well-known Dvaravati princess. Actually, modern women wear an ankle length sarong, but the designer decided to use Dvaravati calf

length sarong for easy movements on stage. Costume designers for Thai classical dance should be aware of the dancers' movements because of those sophisticated and elaborate Thai classical dance patterns the dancers have to perform (Iamsakul, 2011).

5.3 Choreography Design

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 (Thongkamsuk, 2002; Iamsakul, 2011).

5.4 Musical Composition

The composer intended to compose 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).

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.

7. Acknowledgement

This research is funded by Bunditpatanasilpa Institute.

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