

RAM AND RABAM: THE OPENING DANCE IN THE RATTANAKOSIN ERA (KING RAMA IX REIGN)

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to study the types of Ram and Rabam for the Opening Dances, dance components used in the dance in the Rattanakosin Era, during the IX reign. (His Majesty King Bhumipol, 1946-2016). The findings of the research reveal that Ram and Rabam, the opening dance performances can be classified into 2 main types as follows; the common dance and the dance which accompanies by the song with the words which depends on the events and occasions. There are seven major components of the Ram and Rabam dances: The performances are in the form of Thai theatrical dancing, Performers are grouped into five character types, Costumes (the Yuen Khreung style costumes, the Nang Nai costumes, regional folk dance costumes from four regions of Thailand and other types of costumes) Props, Tang Soom (dancers positioned) Lyrics and melody and Occasions.

Keywords: Ram and Rabam, The Opening Dance, The Rattanakosin Era (King Rama IX Reign)

INTRODUCTION

Thai theatrical arts are part of the nation's artistic and cultural heritage, which has been continuously developed alongside the history of Thailand. They play an important role in Thai society and have been a part of the Thais' way of life in terms of the people's beliefs, cultural rites, moral teachings, education, and entertainment. The atrical arts, a variety of the performing arts created to serve various purposes, are a product of human inspiration, and have, therefore, altered according to the social situations surrounding them. Until the present-day, these changes throughout time have had an influence on Thai performing arts, especially on Thai theatrical performances consisting of traditional dance, music, and lyrics, commonly known as Ram and Rabam or Thai Classical Dance.

Even though the common practice of each of them differs, together these dances constitute a fascinating and perfect kind of theatrical art that can still be witnessed in Thailand today. In addition to the aforementioned dances, it has also been common for traditional Thai dance performances to be divided into the main show and a short separate show prior to it. This shorter show is called the "opening dance performance."

Evidence has shown that opening dance performances have been popular since the Ayutthaya era (1350-1767). There are many types of opening dances: Thai folk games, brief dances without stories (Ram, and Rabam), and short shows (Lakorn). The traditions and customs of these opening dances have been preserved, developed, and handed down to later generations of performers, and are under the supervision of a special governmental unit. Various higher education institutions also lend a hand in the maintenance of this unique national cultural heritage.

OBJECTIVE

To study the types of Ram and Rabam Dances and dance components used in the dance.

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted with the following research methods.

- 1 . Data research consists of documentary research, in-depth interview and participant and non-participant observation
2. Research tools include interview and observation related to types and patterns of Ram and Rabam Dances, dance components used in the dance.

3. Data Collection Methods

3.1 Documentary research aims to analyze types and patterns of Ram and Rabam dances.

3.2 Field research can be divided into 2 parts

3.2.1 Interview with the professionals in Thai classical dance, Thai classical dance professors, national artists and Thai classical dance experts from The Fine Arts Department of Thailand.

3.2.2 The observation of the Ram and Rabam dances that were hosted by The Fine Arts Department of Thailand and/or video records of the shows.

4. Data Analysis is done by collecting the data from documentary research, interviews and observations related and dividing into issues according to research objectives. The researcher reviews the data obtained, analyze and interpret in order to understand each issue, then compile and write the complete research report.

RESULTS

The original short opening dance before the main show was in the form of a brief performance of dancing with music. There was no story told. It was later developed into a short “story dance” when lyrics were added to the music. Subsequently, a number of stories have been created for use as the introductory stories for Khon shows.

The opening dance performances prior to the reign of His Majesty King Rama IX can be categorized into two periods:

1. The period from Ayutthaya to Early Rattanakosin (King Rama II)

The opening dance performances maintained the traditions of the Ayutthaya era, i.e. shows of Thai folk games, brief dances with music (Ram and Rabam), and story dances.

2. The period from King Rama III to King Rama VIII

Developments and changes were made in each group of opening dance performers and to the opening dance performance as a whole. Stories especially for these types of shows and a greater variety of opening dance performances were created.

For the Opening dance performances in the form of dances or may be called “Ram and Rabam” in Thai language. These dances are similar type in Thai dance related to dancing components but the different is the number of dancer in the dance show;

- “Ram” can be used regardless the number of dancer.

“Rabam” can be used when the dancer are at least 2 persons.

Ram and Rabam show with the longest history that can be traced back to the Ayutthaya era is Ram Praleng, an auspicious introductory show for the entire performance. The performers are clad as hairless angels dancing along with the Klom and Chamnan music with peacock feathers in their hands.



Figure 1: Ram Praleng

This show has been performed until the present day and it was used as the foundation of a new dance developed during the Rama IV era: Ram Kingmai Ngen Thong.



Figure 2: Ram Kingmai Ngerm Thong

Ram Kingmai Ngerm Thong was similar to Ram Praleng, the performers of Ram Kingmai Ngen Thong dance in pairs while they are dressed as heroes in the Yuen Khreung style:-

- Costumes commonly form in Thai classical dances
- Wearing traditional pinnacled coronets and holding silver and gold twigs which symbolize tributes from dependent nations.

The types of Ram and Rabam for the Opening Dances

During the reign of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX, 1946-2016), Ram and Rabam dance performances held by various organizations and educational institutions are based on the Thai theatrical arts, and can be categorized into two types:

1. The common dances

These are brief shows accompanied by music with or without lyrics used for general occasions. When lyrics are employed, the content is a general description, a description of nature, or a description of the benefits of certain topics. These dances can be performed for any occasion, though they are not generally used for the purpose of giving blessings. The beauty of the performers, dancing gestures, costumes, dancer position arrangements, the lyrics and melody of the music are the highlights of these dances.

2. The dances with lyrics for special events and occasions

Similar to the common dances, these dances are brief shows, but they are accompanied by lyrics that describe the event or occasion for which the dances are performed. Each of these opening dance performances may be performed for only a few times or, for some, only once, as specific persons, events, and occasions are mentioned. The content of the music always involves blessings. These dances are named according to the purpose of each performance, as follows:

2.1 Ram Sadudi show: For celebrating and announcing the reputation of certain persons that have brought great benefit to the country.

2.2 Ram Asirawat or Ram Thawai Phraphon show: For offering good wishes to the king and the royal family.

2.3 Ram Therd Phrakiat show: For extolling the king or a member of the royal family who has created merits for the society and the nation.

2.4 The Ram Uayphon or Amnuayphon show: For giving blessings for a specific event or occasion. These shows are accompanied by lyrics describing the event or occasion and giving blessings to the participants.

Table1: Differences between Common Dances and Dances with Lyrics for Special Events and Occasions

No.	Common Dances	Dances with Lyrics for Special Events and Occasions
1.	With or without lyrics	1. Always with lyrics
2.	Lyrics concern a general description of the topics related to the name of the dance.	2. Lyrics concern a specific event, occasion, or an important person of the event.
3.	There are no blessings at the end of the dance.	3. There are always blessings for specific persons and participants in the event.
4.	The same shows can be performed repeatedly.	4. The show may perform only once in specific occasions or special events.
5.	These dances can be used as opening dances or as consecutive dance performances.	5. These dances are only used as opening dance performances.

All in all, each type of Ram and Rabam performances is unique and can be categorized according to the characteristics of the show. The general focus of all of them, nonetheless, is placed upon auspicious topics and honoring persons or viewers.

Finally, there are seven major components of the Ram and Rabam dances:

1. The presentation of the Ram and Rabam dances: These performances are in the form of Thai theatrical dancing.

2. Performers: Performers are grouped into five character types: male angels, female angels, man , woman, and animals.

3. Costumes: There are four common kinds of costumes used in these Ram and Rabam dances, as follows:

3.1 The Yuen Khreung style costumes for male and female angels..



Figure 4: The Yuen Khreung style costumes for male and female angels

3.2 The Nang Nai costumes: These costumes are imitations of the apparel worn of court ladies, i.e. wearing Pha Jip Na Nang (a pleated hip wrapper folded in the front) with a Sabai Chiang (a shawl used to wrap around the upper part of the body) with one end thrown over the left shoulder, leaving the right shoulder bare; or wearing Pha Jip and a blouse with long tube-shaped sleeves under a Sabai Pak or Sabai Tat Thong. Head and body accessories appropriate to the clothes are also worn. Together, these kinds of costumes are referred to in Thai theatrical arts as Nang Nai costumes.

The accessories for the costumes are comprised of:

- Head ornaments: Kiaw (an ornament worn over one's topknot), Kiaw Yot (a similar ornament with a pointed top), Kiaw Plew (a similar ornament with Kanok on either side), and Chon Hoo (an ear ornament). A dancer may also let her hair loose or put her hair up with a flower behind her ear.

- Other accessories include belts and buckles, necklaces, Sai Tua (long chains worn over the shoulders), bracelets, Ton Khaen (a bracelet worn on the upper arm), and earrings.



Figure 5: The Nang Nai costume styles

3.3 Regional folk dance costumes from four regions of Thailand



Figure 6: The regional folk dance costumes from the north and the south regions of Thailand



Figure 7: The regional folk dance costumes from the north-east and the middle regions of Thailand

3.4 Other types of costumes, e.g. national costumes, animal costumes, etc.



Figure 8: Lao, national costumes and Garuda, animal costumes

4. Props, it may or may not be used in the opening dance performances. Examples of props that are used are silver- and gold-color twigs, flowers, garlands, large candles on candlesticks with garlands, and other props created by each institution.

5. Tang Soom (dancers positioned and staying still for a brief moment before changing their positions, commonly used for the ending of a performance) and Prae Taew (dancer's position movement & arrangements)

Another crucial component of opening dance performances is the changing of the arrangements of the dancer position while performing. The artistic element is taken into consideration to create aesthetic balance as dancers change their positions (Prae Taew) or separate into two balanced columns (Tang Soom). This creativity in the dancer arrangements has made the opening dance performances popular, and many have used them on other occasions as well.



Figure 8: Tang Soom (dancers positioned)

6. Lyrics and melody

Thai music are used at medium and fast speed, as designated by the script writer, the music composer, the producer, and the host of the occasion. The lyrics are divided into two parts: the first part explains the purposes of the occasion, and the second part is dedicated to giving blessings to an important person (or persons) and the participants of the event. The Thai Pi Phat Ensemble with Khreung Ha (six instruments), Khreung Khu (nine instruments), and Khreung Yai (over ten instruments) are used.

7. Occasions

These opening dance performances can be used to offer good wishes to His Majesty the King and Her Majesty the Queen; to give blessings during the celebration of an important occasion, day of the nation, a person, a group of people, or an organization; to welcome guests of the state; and to honor an important person of the nation.

CONCLUSION

Originated from and partially complying with the traditional Thai dances of the past, the opening dance performances in the Rattanakosin era (during the reign of King Rama IX) have been developed greatly and are now equipped with unique presentation styles. In this era, there are no longer opening dance performances in the form of folk games. The opening dance performances in the types of Ram and Rabam dances have become more popular as they are innovative and created specifically for special events and occasions. As a result, they can be used both as opening dance performances and as dances for the celebration of persons, places, and occasions. Their uniqueness is also due to the use of a variety of costumes, such as traditional costumes in the Nang Nai styles, folk dance styles, national costumes, and animal costumes. The music employed in these dance performances is traditional style with or without lyrics, while at least three songs are typically used. They are typically used as opening dance performances and are now broadly used on many general occasions.

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