

The Creation of Dance “Laos Impression”

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Abstract. Bang Sai Kai community, a village with a long history of flute production combined with good quality flute making skills, it is elaborate and accepted by both domestic and foreign people. There is a valuable cultural capital resulting from the accumulation of knowledge, clearly reflecting the way of life and local culture. The research team received funding from the academic service grant, Potential Development and Sustainable Quality of Life in the Community Project (2021) conducted a creative dance research to find patterns in creating dances from local wisdom, flute making of Bang Sai Kai community (Laos Village) under the name of the performance, Laos Impression. It is carried out by qualitative research methods and creative research methods through a research document survey tool; history, way of life, art and culture, and local wisdom of the Lao people in Bang Sai Kai community, interview with creative dance experts, village sage, research participants, and bring the experience of the synthetic research team to analyze data and create performance elements. The story is divided into 3 periods: the first period is immigration, the second period is lifestyle and flute making, and the third period is flute decoration through storytelling in sequence. The performers consider the talents of various forms of dance, supporting the choreography to have a variety of dimensions. Choreography uses movements in everyday life in the expectation of understanding the audiences uncomplicated. Sound chooses the right tone to compose a song with a Laos accent. Props are made of hardwood and can convey a wide range of meanings. Light only needs clarity in a presentation where the viewer must be able to see facial expressions and movement. Costumes focus on details that communicate the story very well.

INTRODUCTION

Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University is a higher education institution located in Thonburi, the area surrounded by the communities which contain a variety of ethnical diversity including original lifestyle, traditions, and cultures, all of which are unique and have long history. One of the communities is Bang Sai Kai (Ban Lao Village) where its long history was written in the annals, Vol. 23, No. 39 as “...Lao people scatter in government officials’ almost everywhere and there is an evidence showing that a number of Lao people had settled Ban Somdej Chaopraya Community since the Thonburi Period.” The community also stands out for its local wisdom such as making pickled fish, handcrafting actors’ masks, and especially producing “khluis” or flutes. It is also well-known as one of the places for the top flutes in Thailand. From what mentioned earlier, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University, see the importance of such local wisdom which is an identity of Bang Sai Kai Community (Ban Lao Village); therefore, the faculty has launched the Humanities and Social Sciences Project for Academic Services for Life Quality Enhancement of the Community: Creating the Identity of Bang Sai Kai Community (Ban Lao Village) through the Creative Thai Dance, under the BSRU Strategic Project for Local Development of the fiscal year 2020. The performance is called Lao Impression.

Lao Impression is a creation of Thai dance from the identity of Bang Sai Kai Community. The dance is aimed to present the local wisdom of making khluis. Moreover, lifestyle of people in the community is inserted in the performance. The creation of Thai dance is derived from the local wisdom of producing khluis particularly in Bang Sai Kai Community, in Hiranruchi Sub-District, Thonburi District, Bangkok. The people in the community were once those of Vientiane from Laos who had settled Bang Sai Kai area since the Thonburi Period. Ban Lao Village or Bang Sai Kai has long history in producing khluis. The community’s products are high-quality and neat, and they are well-known for their quality to people both in the country and others. This is considered a reflection of the local wisdom heritage and of the skills of the flute makers of Ban Lao Village.

OBJECTIVES

To create the identity of the community through the creation of Thai dance from the local wisdom of producing khluis in Bang Sai Kai Community (Ban Lao Village)

CLARIFYING CREATIVE COGNITION

Creative Cognition

Creative cognition is considered one factor that leads arts and sciences to better directions and paves ways for invention, use, and value to a creation, all of which influence physical and mental living of humankind. Particularly in art, it is found that creative cognition is a tremendous urge that brings about inspiration. It is what makes each piece of art different from one another and eventually becomes unique. The term 'creative cognition' together with its definitions has been studied and briefly described as follows:

Hugill et al. defined creative cognition as "creativity as a natural process of seeking new things and make use of them to enhance quality of life for human beings. Creativity widely opens to a variety of arts and sciences. It can be tolerance, ambiguity, and needs of every human generation." (Hugill, Yang, Rakzinski & Sawle, 2013: 238). To define creative cognition in an overall picture of a society is usually to talk about importance of having freedom in creating new things. In terms of an industrial society, the concept is linked to material development. However, creative cognition is not related only to material production. The meaning of creative cognition also concerns living and work of art including selection (Wirun Tangcharoen, 2004: 145). To summarize, creative cognition is invention involving free-thinking processes which has positive influence on arts and sciences and it brings about new developments for utilization and value to something which affects improvement in quality of life.

Semiology

To design a creative dance, a "sign" is a key feature in construction of a concept and creative cognition as it is used to tell a story in a form of a symbol. Prof. Dr. Chairat Charoensin-o-larn explained that semiology "is an academic field that studies communication processes by considering the nature of communication units and work procedures to understand how the meaning is conveyed. Therefore, semiology is a form of knowledge for understanding a certain thing in a relation system where a symbol serves as a representative of something and is collocated with the word 'sign'" (Chairat Charoensin-o-larn, 2002: 27). After consideration, semiology is related to a symbol. According to Pleang Na Nakorn, semiology is "characteristics of anything which symbolizes another (Pleang Na Nakorn, 1992: 399). That is to say, symbolic systems which exist in humans' thought are all expressed through symbols such as a language, code, signal, mark, etc. including things created to symbolize actual objects or people in a particular role and context.

From what mentioned earlier, it can be seen that, apart from verbal communication, human beings are able to communicate through a sign which they make to convey a message to other people. In this study, the dance creators applied the concept of a sign to designing a creative work in order to explain different symbols in the designing process that are used to express or communicate meanings instead of spoken words.

Performing Arts

In the Preservation and Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage Act B.E. 2559 and the Convention for the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the characteristics of intangible cultural heritage are defined. As stated in Chapter 2 Article 7, "the performing arts range from music, dance, and theater; traditionally elaborately and/or contemporarily performed in front of a live audience with the intention of creating aesthetics, entertainment and/or performances which stimulate the process of critical thinking leading to development and social changes." In Article 8, performing arts can be categorized into two types which are (1) vocal and instrumental music or "...the sound of music performed on musical instruments and singing that makes up a tune..." which can create pleasure, emotional expressions, and imagination. The purpose of this type is "...to accompany rites and ceremonies or performances. Music is thus an adjunct to ritual and dance drama," and it is a part of the performances, contests, and entertainment. (2) Dance and theater mean any performances that convey physical expressions, rhythmic movements, steps, and gestures that conform with "... voice-over, vocal range, singing, screenplay, and props, etc. reflecting a sentiment or mood or illustrating a specific event or daily act. The performance can be accompanied or unaccompanied by music and singing..." Dance and theater are divided into those in rituals, those telling stories, and those in series but not telling a story. For the uniqueness that shows the identity of intangible cultural heritage, the term "performing arts" covers forms, types, development, convention, belief, sequence, performance, stage management, music notes, songs, scripts, props, and choreography (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2017: 119, 198-199).

Dance Creation

To create the dance, Roi Lao: Bang Sai Kai, the dance creators used choreographic concepts as well as performance design principles as a key component to design and create the performance. The concepts and principles are described as follows:

Plotting and Scriptwriting

Plotting and scriptwriting is considered the most important component as it sets the direction of a performance to meet the objectives of a creator. Plotting and scriptwriting makes the creation clear as it is the main structure for expressing the ideas of the creators, specifies components in different aspects, and gives the created piece unity and cohesion. Wanasak Padungsestakit gave an opinion towards the importance of scripts that "a script is of vital importance. It is a blueprint for creating a piece of work out of different components to perfection. For example, performers have to interpret the script, memorize it, and convey the message of it on stage. Stage designers also need to understand the script and search for settings and situations to design the stage including scenery, costumes, and lights as set by a director. Therefore, a script is not just an entertaining piece to read, but it has to communicate and functionally creates an actual performance. Modern scripts should be flexible and allow adjustments of certain components to conform with an artist's creation procedure (Wanasak Padungsestakit, Interview, 9 December 2018). To create the performance, Roi Lao: Khlui Bang Sai Kai, the dance creators studied history and production of khluis in Bang Sai Kai Community (Ban Lao Village) and did field research to collect data to write a script and design a performance style.

Performer Selection

Selecting performers is very important for creating a dance performance. It is necessary to select performers who are able to convey ideas, patterns, or characteristics of the performance based on the objectives. Sun Tawalwongsri explained that "there are many ways to select performers to take the role in performing arts, but the three main methods are 1) Audition, 2) Casting, and 3) Tryout. Audition is a way to select performers out of a big number. The selectors have never seen the ability of performers before. The performers are given a script to follow and rehearse and those who fail will be eliminated. Casting involves picking up those with specific features or wanted characteristics. This is a smaller group and the number of performers is usually specified beforehand. For tryout, the selectors have already known the ability and potential of the performers, but the performers may show off further for seeking a suitable role or ways to create a performance. This method is widely-used among the designers and performers who used to work together or known one another before (Sun Tawalwongsri, 2016: 93). In this study, a tryout is used to select the potential performers who meet the dance creators' expectation.

Choreography

Choreography or designing movements and styles, described by Butterwort & Wildschut, consists of four steps: Improvisation, Development, Evaluation, and Resemblance. The steps are used for a start, selection, collection, and specification of what is wanted.

Step 1 Improvisation

In this step, the performers are in trial for their movement following their feelings and emotions at the moment without a director directing the movements. The performers must initiate their movements immediately following what happens at the moment of the performance.

Step 2 Development

Development is when the details in the movements are changed, choreographic design takes place, and various movements are developed such as extending movements, contracting them, highlighting them, or changing their speed and directions.

Step 3 Evaluation

The choreographer has to evaluate his/her own work regularly and immediately once the work is complete. It is necessary to find alternatives to solve or stop the problems that may occur in every piece of creation. The choreographer has to keep going or sometimes pause to restart.

Step 4 Resemblance

Resemblance is categorizing things that are similar to each other in terms of styles, movements, feelings of movement, and feelings affected by a combination of movements to conform with the intended content or issue (Tanakorn Sunvarphiphu and Naraphong Charassri, 2018: 296-297).

In this matter, the dance creators saw that an experiment in finding an approach to designing a dance following the four steps may suggest interesting styles and movements. Improvisation requires a performer's experience and

sagacity that is conveyed through different styles and movements. This step opens to experience sharing and it allows the creators to select the movements which are suitable for the intended topic following the concept. It also includes self- and heuristic evaluation which leads to creative work development that can communicate clearly and in unitedly.

Composition of an Accompaniment

Music is the component that makes a performance complete. Its role is to determine the rhythm of styles and movements and to give aesthetic sense to the performance. It is conformed with the point of view of Jeromy Hopgood who explained that "sound design for a dance performance requires understanding of dance operation and technology and the knowledge of how a variety of performances are made to connect with sound. To sum up, a sound designer should be knowledgeable and is an important person for a dance crew as every aspect of dance is connected to sound. A choreographer and a sound designer should work together closely in order to create a piece of work" (Hopgood, 2916: 97).

Costume Design

Costumes are not only clothes that cover the body of each performer, but they also tell the roles of each character and reflects the conceptual framework which the creator would like to communicate to audience to perceive. According to Joan Schlaich and Betty Dupont, "costumes are what extend a dancer's movements. They are not just accessories but a medium which a choreographer uses on the body of the dancer. Therefore, costume designers and dancers should work together, and there should be flexibility and preparedness for contradictions. Costumes communicate the ideas of a creator; therefore, they should be designed according to the dance. In addition, there should not be large investment in costume design. Instead, costume design should focus on entertainment that responds to certain ideas. For example, in the 18th century, costume design was mainly concerned with nature, beauty, and aesthetics in body lines. During that time, clothes were meant to support free body movement. Later, in the early 19th century, costume design was emphasized on creativity and innovation which represents the identity of a choreographer. The costumes are consistent with the dancer's body shape as much as possible. Colors are another important part which should be considered together with the complexion of a dancer. The choreographer should be able to think of how the movements and styles would be represented. The representation should go along with other aspects such as textile, operation, and adjustment (Schlaich and Dopont, 1998: 56-69).

Prop Design

Props help increase pleasure and understanding in the performance. They also portray the pictures which the creator would like to present. Props make the performance more complete and communicate the message to the audience. The role of props used in a performance is important for communicating the message to the audience in both a direct and interpretational ways. Props also symbolically communicate the message in the performance. Yutthana Umrarong explained the significance of props including their relationship with performance design that "props are considered an important support for a performance. To select the props, one should choose those that can present the feelings which the creator would like to communicate. Proper props should also reinforce the movements and make them complete, and they should be used worthily. Props have a great impact on choreography. Therefore, the creator should be aware of designing movements that are in harmony with the props like the props are a part of the body (Yutthana Umrarong, Interview, 11 September 2018).

RESULT

Performance Format

The dance creators have specified the concept for creating the performance by presenting it in the form of the contemporary dance. The dance is divided into three phases as follows:

Phase 1 The Emigration

The first part of the performance presents the emigration of Vientiane people from Laos to Bang Sai Kai Community, starting from the journey to the settlement and home establishment to the immigrants' lifestyle in the beginning of the settlement.

Phase 2 Khlui Production

The performance portrays the relationship between khluis and lifestyle of people in the community including the production process of khluis. The production occurred because of the immigrants' nostalgia for their home country and hometown. To relieve their loneliness, the immigrants thought of making a musical instrument. In this performance, the parts of the production process are shown such as the events of finding bamboo, cutting it, shaping it, and carving it.

Phase 3 Khlui Patterns

The performance shows the identity of Bang Sai Kai's patterns of khluis which are original and unique. The particular patterns also appear on the walls at the entrance to the community. There are polished wood flutes, Spanish cherry patterned flutes, Lai Rot Nam (glided black lacquered) flutes, Krajab patterned flutes, Hokkamane patterned flutes, Talok patterned flutes, and Lai Hin patterned flutes.

Performers

The performance involves skilled performers in Thai dance and Western dance. It consists of 8 female performers and 7 male performers.

Movements

Choreography for the performance, Roi Lao: Khlui Bang Sai Kai, involves movements and styles of Thai dance, ballet, and everyday movement in combination, all of which are presented throughout the performance.

Costumes

For the costume design, the dance creators were inspired by the characteristics of khluis. The shirts and trousers are in light brown which resembles the color of bamboo or wood that is used to make khluis. The dress is ornamented with side drapes and a piece of breast cloth of which pattern is similar to that of Vientiane and the other side is the cloth which is painted seven patterns of khluis. The whole costume is telling the story of khluis, their background, origin, decorations, and different patterns and designs. The accessories were also designed based on the appearance of frangipanis—the symbolic flowers of Laos.

Backing Track

The backing track for Roi Lao, Khlui Bang Sai Kai was newly arranged to make it sound modern and tell the story of Lao people including their lifestyle and their background of khlui production in Bang Sai Kai Community. The music consists of six parts in the scales of do-re-mi-so-la which are the scales of Thai music featuring the Lao tone. The first, second, and third parts are repeated by Thai musical instruments. In the fourth part, the melody is played more briefly and inserted with the flute (khlui) intro and flute solo during the song. The fifth and sixth parts are faster and joyful. The parts combine some western instruments to create the feelings and portray how skillful the new generations of Lao people in Bang Sai Kai Community are in terms of accompanying traditional flutes with other kinds of musical instruments around the world.

Props

The props used in the performance are round-shaped hardwood with a diameter of four cm. and the length of 150 cm.

DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The created work, Roi Lao: Khlui Bang Sai Kai, serves as an approach to creation to present the identity of a community. The identity is presented through the idea of creation of dance performance from local wisdom. The performance can be used as a medium for creating an image and promoting tourism accordingly.

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