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Decoding the Aesthetic Structure and Cultural Value of Thai Archaeological Dances

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Abstract

Thai archaeological dances (*Rabam Borankhadi*) represent a distinctive artistic endeavour in which archaeological and historical evidence is translated into embodied performance. Since their creation by the Fine Arts Department in 1967, the five dance sets—*Dvaravati*, *Srivijaya*, *Lopburi*, *Chiang Saen*, and *Sukhothai*—have served not only as representations of different historical periods, but also as a coherent system of creative interpretation that bridges past material culture and living performance practice. This study examines the shared aesthetic structure underlying the five archaeological dance sets, with particular attention to choreography, music, costume design, and spatial organisation. It further explores the cultural value of archaeological dances from their original historical context to their contemporary circulation. A qualitative research approach grounded in historical inquiry was employed, drawing on documentary sources, photographic materials, expert interviews in Thai classical dance, and video analysis of official performances produced by the Fine Arts Department. The findings reveal that, despite stylistic variations linked to specific historical contexts, the archaeological dances are unified by a common conceptual framework. Choreographic design is characterised by specialised hand gestures and signature movement motifs derived from archaeological evidence; musical compositions share a consistent structural progression while employing period-evocative instrumentation; costume design balances archaeological reference with theatrical adaptation; and spatial organisation emphasises symmetry and legibility. Together, these elements constitute a shared aesthetic structure that enables archaeological imagery to be transformed into coherent performance. From a cultural perspective, the study argues that archaeological dances function both as foundational models for later historically informed dance creations and as a form of cultural soft power. Through their adaptability and recognisable aesthetic identity, archaeological dances continue to mediate between heritage, contemporary creativity, and global cultural circulation.

Keywords: Thai archaeological dances; aesthetic structure; choreography; cultural value; soft power

1. Introduction

Archaeological dances in Thailand constitute a distinctive corpus of classical dance works created through the artistic reinterpretation of archaeological and historical evidence. Developed by the Fine Arts Department in 1967 under the direction of Dhanit Yupho, these dances emerged as a systematic response to archaeological discoveries, including relief sculptures, stucco figures, murals, and ancient artefacts from various historical periods

(Jamreantong, 2021). Collectively, the archaeological dance repertoire comprises five dance sets—*Dvaravati*, *Srivijaya*, *Lopburi*, *Chiang Saen*, and *Sukhothai*—each associated with a particular cultural context while together forming a unified framework of performance grounded in archaeological research and creative interpretation. Existing scholarship has consistently emphasised the refined aesthetic qualities of archaeological dances, drawing attention to choreographic forms adapted from ancient sculptures, the integration of music and movement, carefully designed costumes, and balanced spatial formations. These elements have been widely acknowledged as central to the artistic significance of archaeological dances and have contributed to their inclusion within formal dance education and their influence on subsequent creative practices. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature has focused on individual dance sets or treated aesthetic components as discrete elements, resulting in limited discussion of the shared aesthetic structure that underpins the archaeological dances as a coherent creative system. From a methodological perspective, the creation of archaeological dances involved a multidisciplinary process integrating archaeology, history, music, and fine arts. Choreographic construction was informed by close analysis of bas-reliefs, sculptures, and ancient iconography, which were translated into principal poses and subsequently connected through transitional movements derived from classical Thai dance principles. Comparable studies on conceptual choreography based on ancient art objects suggest that such practices constitute a structured creative methodology, transforming static visual forms into embodied movement while maintaining symbolic and stylistic coherence (Ruangjirayos, 2021).

Beyond their formal aesthetic qualities, archaeological dances also possess enduring cultural value. Research on the performance of archaeological dances in contemporary contexts indicates that, despite adaptations necessitated by tourism and commercial presentation, core elements—including choreography, music, costume, and spatial organisation—continue to demonstrate a considerable degree of authenticity. This continuity highlights the role of archaeological dances as a form of living heritage, capable of mediating between historical representation and present-day cultural practice. Accordingly, this study adopts a holistic approach to the examination of archaeological dances in Thailand by decoding both their aesthetic structure and their cultural value. Rather than analysing each dance set in isolation, the paper identifies shared structural principles across the five archaeological dances in relation to choreographic organisation, musical characteristics, costume design, and spatial formation. In addition, it examines the cultural value of archaeological dances from past to present, considering their significance as foundational models for later creative practices and as expressions of artistic modernity embedded within historical performance. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute to broader scholarly discussions on performance, heritage interpretation, and the role of dance in translating archaeological knowledge into contemporary artistic expression.

1.1 Research Objective

- 1.To study aesthetic structure of archaeological dances in Thailand by identifying common principles of choreography, music, costume design, and spatial organization across the five-dance set
- 2.To examine cultural value of archaeological dances in Thailand

2. Literature review

The Archaeological Dance series, known in Thai as *Rabam Borankhadi*, represents a collection of five specialized performances created to illustrate the artistic and cultural characteristics of five distinct historical periods in Thailand: *Dvaravati*, *Srivijaya*, *Lopburi*, *Chiang Saen*, and *Sukhothai*. These dances were conceptualized in 1967 (B.E. 2510) by Mr. Dhanit Yupho, then Director-General of the Fine Arts Department. The primary objective was to transform static archaeological evidence—such as stone reliefs, sculptures, and stucco—into lifelike movements to educate the general public on historical values and foster a deeper appreciation of Thai heritage. The conceptual choreography of these dances was a systematic and multidisciplinary endeavor, integrating archaeology, history, music, and fine arts. The creative process was divided into four primary pillars: historical research, choreography, costume design, and musical composition. Leading masters of Thai dance, including Mrs. Lamul Yamakupt, Mrs. Chaley Sukhavanich, and Thanpuying Paew Snidvongseni, studied ancient poses from bas-reliefs and bronze statues to serve as the foundation for the movements. Mr. Montri Tramod, a national expert in Thai music, composed the melodies to evoke the cultural atmosphere of each period. Instruments were either reconstructed from archaeological depictions or selected for their ethnic tonality. For costume design were created based on the characteristic of ancient objects of each period by selected artistes and designers. Furthermore, dancer selection was strictly based on physical resemblance to the period's sculptures (Ruangjirayos, 2021).

The significance of *Rabam Borankhadi* extends beyond performance; it serves as a "living" museum of Thai history (Suntiatchawan, 2018). The series debuted on May 25, 1967, at the National Museum, Bangkok, for King Rama IX and Queen Sirikit. Its enduring importance is highlighted by its integration into the national curriculum of the College of Dramatic Arts, ensuring that subsequent generations understand the creative processes of their ancestors. In 2012, these dances were registered as a national Intangible Cultural Heritage, cementing their status as a vital tool for both academic study and cultural tourism (Khwanok, 2015). Today, they remain a staple in hospitality and tourism sectors, though scholars emphasize the necessity of maintaining their "authenticity" and original artistic standards against commercial pressures.

In Thai classical dance, the concept of *Aesthetic Structure* refers to an integrated and holistic system of aesthetic organisation through which artistic elements are harmonised to produce refined beauty and expressive depth. This structure is founded upon the interrelationship of three principal aesthetic dimensions: visual arts, musical arts, and choreographic arts. *Visual aesthetics* encompass costume design, colour symbolism, bodily form, and spatial composition, all of which contribute to the creation of cultural identity and visual harmony on stage. *Musical aesthetics* involve instrumental accompaniment and vocal performance, in which rhythm, tempo, and melodic contour shape emotional atmosphere and guide movement, enabling aesthetic communication through sound. *Choreographic aesthetics* are realised through codified dance movements derived from traditional dance principles, characterised by graceful bodily control, precise rhythmic alignment, expressive facial gestures, and symbolic movement vocabulary. Developed through Thai performance traditions and classical aesthetic philosophy, this tripartite structure emphasises balance, discipline, and coherence among artistic components, thereby generating an embodied aesthetic experience that engages the audience physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Through this integrated aesthetic structure, Thai classical dance functions not only as an artistic performance but also as a sophisticated medium for transmitting cultural values, symbolic meaning, and collective sensibility.

Figure 1 Female musician in Dvaravati era



Source: Fine Art Department, 2014

In performing arts, *cultural value* extends far beyond the function of stage performance for entertainment, encompassing broader social, historical, and epistemological dimensions. Performing arts constitute a form of intangible cultural heritage through which human creativity and cultural identity are articulated, with music and movement functioning as universally embedded yet culturally specific modes of expression. These art forms play essential social roles within ritual practices, communal ceremonies, and everyday life, serving occasions such as rites of passage, seasonal celebrations, and occupational activities. Moreover, performing arts operate as cultural archives that encode historical memory, political narratives, and social structures, often reflecting power relations and collective experiences within a community. Through embodied movement and performative gesture, they communicate emotions, beliefs, and lived realities, symbolically representing activities such as labour, warfare, and daily life. Their cultural significance is further reinforced by their close association with material culture and cultural spaces, including musical instruments, costumes, masks, performance settings, and ritual environments. Crucially, the cultural value of performing arts resides in the intergenerational transmission of specialised knowledge and techniques through traditional teacher–disciple lineages, preserving locally grounded aesthetics, non-standard musical systems, and craft-based practices. Viewed in this light, performing arts function as both a reflective mirror and a sustaining mechanism of communal spirit; when reduced to commodified spectacles or homogenised cultural products, their intrinsic cultural meanings and social vitality risk gradual erosion.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach with a primary emphasis on historical inquiry. Data were collected from a range of secondary sources, including academic documents, textbooks, and relevant photographic materials. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with experts in Thai classical dance to gain professional insights into the creative and interpretative aspects of archaeological dance. The study also involves the analysis

of video recordings of all five archaeological dance performances produced by the Fine Arts Department. These visual materials were examined to identify patterns in choreography, music, costume design, and spatial organisation. The collected data were subsequently analysed and synthesised in accordance with the research objectives.

4. Results

The research findings indicate that the five archaeological dance sets—Dvaravati, Srivijaya, Lopburi, Chiang Saen, and Sukhothai—were created through a shared foundational conceptual framework, despite their representation of artistic landscapes from different historical periods. The creative process underlying these dances is structured around four principal components: (1) historical research based on artistic evidence and surviving traces of ancient civilisations; (2) choreographic design, particularly the creation of movement vocabulary; (3) costume design; and (4) musical composition (Jamreantong, 2021). The study further reveals that the distinctive aesthetic quality, visual originality, and enduring significance of these archaeological dances derive not only from their historical references but also from the systematic integration of expertise across the four creative domains. The involvement of leading specialists with deep knowledge and professional mastery in choreography, music, costume design, and historical interpretation functioned as a crucial driving mechanism in the creative process. This collaborative expertise enabled the archaeological dances to achieve a level of artistic coherence and innovation that was regarded as modern and progressive within the context of Thai classical dance in the 1970s. As a result, the five archaeological dance sets have come to be recognised as masterworks of Thai classical dance, distinguished by their capacity to synthesise historical research with contemporary artistic sensibilities while establishing new creative standards within the field.

The historical research undertaken for each period as a foundational basis for creative production required specialists with extensive knowledge of art history and archaeological materials, as well as a sound understanding of anthropology, sociology, and iconography. These interdisciplinary competencies were essential for analysing the plausibility and historical coherence of ancient artistic forms. In the creation of the five archaeological dance sets, Dhanit Yupho played a central role as the principal expert responsible for historical and archaeological research. At the time, he served as Director-General of the Fine Arts Department and was entrusted with overseeing all aspects of national artistic and cultural heritage. His expertise in both art and dance enabled him to function as the key figure guiding the interpretation of archaeological evidence for choreographic creation (Kromsilapakorn, 1968).

Choreographic design was undertaken by three eminent masters of Thai classical dance: Mrs Lamul Yamakupt, Mrs Chaley Sukhavanich, and Thanpuying Paew Snidvongseni. All three were artists trained within the royal court tradition and were among the pioneering choreographers of Thai classical dance in its formative period. Their contributions were instrumental in establishing foundational movement vocabularies that later became integral to formal dance education in Thailand. Through their collaborative expertise, the choreographic structures of the archaeological dances were systematically developed to reflect both classical conventions and historically informed interpretation.

Musical composition was overseen by Mr Montri Tramod, a revered master of Thai music, national artist, and influential composer. His role encompassed not only musical creation but also scholarly contributions to the study of Thai music and dance. His

compositions for the archaeological dances were carefully designed to correspond with the historical and cultural atmospheres of each period, thereby reinforcing the coherence between music and movement.

Costume design was entrusted to four curators and art specialists from the Fine Arts Department, all of whom possessed extensive expertise in historical art forms. Their responsibilities included the detailed study of stylistic motifs from each historical period and the translation of artistic patterns derived from archaeological artefacts into performance costumes. This process ensured that the visual presentation of the five archaeological dance sets maintained both historical reference and aesthetic consistency within the overall creative structure (Kromsilapakorn, 1968).

4.1 Aesthetic Structure of the Five Archaeological Dance Sets


Based on the conceptual framework and creative factors underlying the production of archaeological dances, the findings reveal that the five archaeological dance sets share a common aesthetic structure. This structural coherence is manifested through several interconnected aspects of performance design, reflecting a unified creative logic despite differences in historical representation.



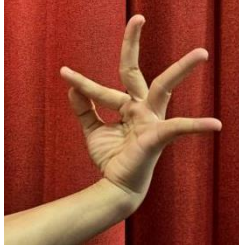

1. Choreographic Design Structure

Across all five archaeological dance sets, choreographic design follows a distinctive and consistent approach. One of the most prominent features of this structure is the use of specialised hand gestures.

Special hand gestures in archaeological dances are intentionally designed to differ from those found in conventional Thai classical dance. These gestures are derived from careful observation and interpretation of hand positions depicted in archaeological artefacts, such as stone reliefs, stucco figures, and sculptural remains. As a result, the hand movements employed in archaeological dances exhibit unique forms and configurations that extend beyond the standard codified gestures of traditional Thai dance. The incorporation of these specialised hand gestures contributes significantly to the visual identity of archaeological dances. They function not merely as decorative elements but as essential components of the choreographic structure, reinforcing historical reference while simultaneously generating a distinctive aesthetic quality. Variations in hand gesture design across the five dance sets reflect different artistic periods, yet they remain unified by a shared design principle rooted in archaeological interpretation. These characteristics are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Specialised Hand Gestures in Thai Archaeological Dances

Dance Title	Type of Specialised Hand Gesture	Description
Dvaravati Dance		The tip of the index finger touches the tip of the thumb, while the remaining fingers are fully extended and held firmly.

Dance Title	Type of Specialised Hand Gesture	Description
Srivijaya Dance		The tip of the middle finger touches the tip of the thumb; the remaining fingers are extended and held straight.
Lopburi Dance		The tip of the thumb touches the tip of the index finger, while the remaining fingers are aligned closely together and fully extended.
Chiang Saen Dance		The tip of the thumb touches the first joint of the index finger; the remaining fingers are extended and spread outward in a fan-like formation.
Sukhothai Dance		The tip of the thumb touches the first joint of the index finger, with the index fingertip extending beyond the thumb; the remaining fingers are fully extended and held closely together.





Source: Phakamas Jirajarurat





As shown in Table 1, the specialised hand gestures employed in each archaeological dance set are fundamentally derived from conventional hand movements in Thai classical dance, such as *jeep* (pinched hand gesture) and *lo kaeo* (gem-holding hand). However, these conventional forms are deliberately reconfigured to generate new symbolic meanings within the context of archaeological dance. Examples include the circular *jeep* hand gesture in the Dvaravati dance and the distinctive Sukhothai- and Lopburi-style *jeep* hand configurations.

The creation of these new hand symbols is grounded in the imitation and interpretation of historical evidence, particularly sculptural and relief representations from archaeological contexts. In this respect, specialised hand gestures function as a strategy for constructing performative identity, enabling each dance set to be visually distinctive and readily recognisable (Potiwetchakul & Vechsuruck , 2022). Moreover, these gestures operate as mnemonic devices, prompting audiences to recall the artistic forms and visual characteristics of specific historical periods represented in the performance. In addition to specialised hand gestures, each of the five archaeological dance sets incorporates at least one distinctive movement sequence directly modelled on archaeological artefacts from its respective historical

period. These choreographic motifs are explicitly designed to reflect postures and bodily configurations evident in surviving artistic evidence. To achieve this, choreographers employ various techniques, including the creation of S-shaped body lines, the lowering of bodily levels below those typically prescribed in conventional Thai dance standards, and the use of forceful, grounded movement qualities characterised by firmness and weight. Through these techniques, archaeological dances extend beyond the replication of traditional dance vocabulary, transforming historical imagery into embodied movement while maintaining structural coherence. This approach reinforces the role of choreography as a mediating mechanism between archaeological evidence and performative expression, further contributing to the unified aesthetic structure that characterises the archaeological dance repertoire.

Table 2: Archaeological Evidence and Distinctive Choreographic Motifs in Archaeological Dances

Dance Title	Archaeological Evidence	Distinctive Choreographic Motif
Dvaravati Dance	 <p data-bbox="627 1160 882 1339">Relief sculptures and terracotta figures depicting standing and slightly flexed postures with subtle body curvature</p>	 <p data-bbox="930 1160 1377 1283">A grounded standing posture with gentle body inclination and controlled arm positioning, reflecting restrained movement and balanced form</p>
Srivijaya Dance	 <p data-bbox="619 1787 890 1933">Bronze sculptures and reliefs showing dynamic poses with lifted arms and asymmetrical balance</p>	 <p data-bbox="930 1787 1377 1877">A lifted-arm posture combined with diagonal body alignment, emphasising rhythmic vitality and flowing movement</p>

Dance Title	Archaeological Evidence	Distinctive Choreographic Motif
Lopburi Dance	 <p data-bbox="628 712 880 860">Khmer-style stone carvings and bronze deities characterised by strong musculature and angular poses</p>	 <p data-bbox="927 712 1382 801">A firm and angular posture with pronounced bends in the limbs, conveying strength, solidity, and sculptural weight</p>
Sukhothai Dance	 <p data-bbox="624 1339 884 1487">Bronze Buddha images and sculptural figures featuring S-shaped body curves and graceful stance</p>	 <p data-bbox="922 1317 1386 1442">An S-shaped body posture with lowered centre of gravity and fluid transitions, expressing elegance and refined movement quality</p>

Source: Phakamas Jirajarurat

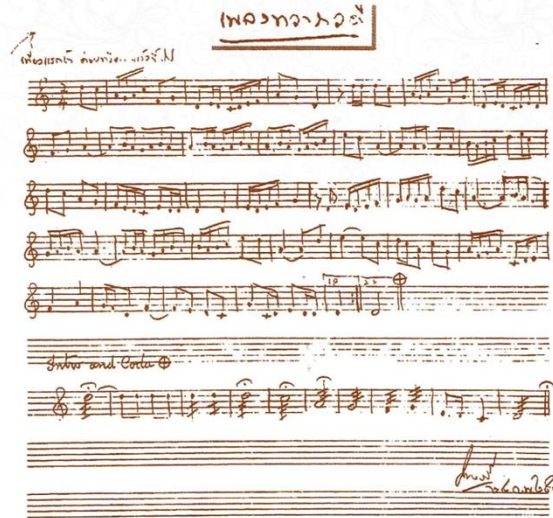
Table 2 demonstrates that each archaeological dance set incorporates distinctive choreographic motifs directly derived from archaeological evidence associated with its respective historical period. These motifs are not generalised representations but carefully selected postural and movement patterns that can be visually traced back to surviving artefacts, including relief sculptures and bronze figures. Across the five dance sets, at least one choreographic sequence is intentionally designed to replicate or reinterpret a historically identifiable posture. Choreographers employ specific movement techniques—such as the creation of S-shaped body lines, the lowering of bodily levels below conventional Thai dance standards, and the use of grounded, forceful movement qualities—to translate static visual forms into embodied performance. Importantly, these distinctive choreographic motifs

function as visual anchors within the performance. They enable audiences to recognise the historical and artistic references embedded in the dances while reinforcing the aesthetic structure shared across the archaeological dance repertoire. Although the stylistic characteristics of each posture vary according to historical context, the underlying choreographic strategy remains consistent: archaeological evidence is transformed into movement through controlled adaptation rather than literal imitation. This approach underscores the role of choreography as a mediating mechanism between archaeological artefacts and performance, contributing to a coherent aesthetic structure that unifies the archaeological dances while preserving their historical specificity.

2. The musical accompaniment

The Music of each archaeological dance set is characterised by the selective use of instruments chosen to evoke the tonal quality, atmosphere, and emotional character associated with its respective historical period. Composers intentionally selected specific melodic and rhythmic instruments to reflect cultural and temporal distinctions, resulting in the formation of specialised ensembles. These ensembles function as mixed instrumental groups comprising both melodic-leading instruments and rhythmic-support instruments, organised in accordance with relevant historical and archaeological evidence (Fine Arts Department, 2014). Despite variations in instrumentation among the five archaeological dance sets, their musical structures exhibit a notable degree of consistency. All performances adhere to a shared compositional framework in which the music begins with a *two-tier rhythmic structure (pleng song chan)*, characterised by a slow and measured tempo, and concludes with a *single-tier rhythmic structure (pleng chan diao)*, marked by a faster tempo. This progression from slow to fast tempo not only establishes a dynamic arc within the performance but also reinforces rhythmic continuity across the archaeological dance repertoire. The use of this consistent musical structure contributes significantly to the overall aesthetic coherence of archaeological dances. While the timbral qualities and instrumental combinations vary according to historical context, the shared rhythmic framework ensures synchronisation between music and movement. As a result, music functions not merely as accompaniment but as an integral structural component that shapes choreographic timing, movement quality, and performative flow. This alignment between musical design and choreographic structure further supports the interpretation of archaeological dances as a unified aesthetic system grounded in historically informed creative practice.

Figure 3: Excerpt from the Musical Score of the Dvaravati Dance by Montri Tramod



Source: Fine Arts Department, 2014

3. Costume Design

Costume design in archaeological dances is primarily derived from archaeological evidence, including sculptural representations and artistic motifs found in ancient artefacts. These historical references provide the conceptual foundation for costume forms, proportions, and decorative patterns. However, in the process of performance adaptation, materials available in contemporary contexts are selectively employed, allowing the costumes to be both practical and suitable for stage presentation. In addition, the use of vibrant colours is intentionally incorporated to enhance visual clarity and aesthetic impact in performance settings. While such colour choices may diverge from the original hues of archaeological materials, they serve a performative function by ensuring visibility, expressiveness, and audience engagement. This adaptive approach reflects a balance between historical reference and theatrical necessity, reinforcing the role of costume design as an integral component of the aesthetic structure of archaeological dances.

4. Spatial Organisation and Direction of Movement

Across all five archaeological dance sets, spatial organisation and movement direction are designed according to principles of symmetry and visual balance. Choreographic formations typically employ simple geometric shapes—such as circles and triangles—rather than complex spatial patterns. Transitions between positions are similarly restrained, favouring linear, diagonal, curved, or circular pathways that maintain clarity and coherence in performance. Performer grouping and compositional arrangement are varied to create visual interest while preserving structural simplicity. Notably, two of the five dance sets are designed with a clear distinction between principal and supporting dancers. In these cases, spatial organisation and movement trajectories are intentionally structured to emphasise the prominence of the principal performer. This hierarchical arrangement reinforces narrative focus and enhances visual legibility, demonstrating a deliberate integration of spatial design with choreographic intent.

Figure 4: Contemporary Costumes of Thai Archaeological Dances



Source: Ram Thai ,2017

4.2 Cultural Value Reflected through the Aesthetic Structure of Archaeological Dances

The aesthetic structure of the archaeological dances reflects significant cultural value in several interrelated dimensions.

First, the five archaeological dance sets function as foundational models for innovative performance creation grounded in historical research. By transforming archaeological evidence and historical data into choreographic works, these dances established a methodological framework that has inspired subsequent creations in Thai dance. Numerous later performances drawing upon historical and archaeological sources have emerged, demonstrating the continuing influence of archaeological dances as a creative paradigm within Thai performing arts.

Second, archaeological dances may be understood as a form of cultural soft power through their capacity to translate artistic symbols into diverse contemporary contexts. Visual motifs, costume elements, and movement vocabularies derived from archaeological dances have been adapted across different artistic media, contributing to the international visibility of Thai cultural identity. A notable contemporary example can be observed in the international television series *The White Lotus* (Season 3), filmed in Thailand and broadcast on HBO. The series features prominent Thai performers and includes a scene in which a character performs a Thai dance for hotel guests. The costume and movement vocabulary in this scene exhibit

clear references to archaeological dance aesthetics—particularly those associated with the Srivijaya style—while being accompanied by contemporary Western music.

This performance sequence attracted widespread attention on digital platforms and generated significant public engagement, including the dissemination of dance imitations and commentary online (Jirajarupat, P., & Rattanachaiwong, N.,2020). Such reception illustrates how archaeological dance aesthetics continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, functioning as a cultural bridge between historical artistic forms and global popular culture. In this sense, archaeological dances not only preserve historical knowledge but also actively participate in the ongoing construction and circulation of Thai cultural identity in the global arena.

Figure 5: Lisa (BLACKPINK) Performing Thai Dance Movements Inspired by the Srivijaya Dance in *The White Lotus* Series



Source: *PostToday*, 2025

The performance of Thai dance movements inspired by the Srivijaya dance style in the international television series *The White Lotus* illustrates how archaeological dance aesthetics function as an effective form of cultural soft power in contemporary global media. In this scene, traditional movement vocabulary derived from archaeological dance is recontextualised within a modern narrative framework and presented through a globally recognised cultural figure. Although accompanied by contemporary Western music and framed within a popular entertainment format, the performance retains identifiable choreographic characteristics associated with Srivijaya dance, particularly in terms of posture, hand gestures, and movement quality.

This visual adaptation demonstrates the capacity of archaeological dance aesthetics to transcend their original performative context and engage new international audiences without relying on direct cultural explanation. The subtle incorporation of historically informed movement into mainstream media enables Thai dance heritage to circulate globally in an

accessible and appealing form. Audience reception, as reflected through widespread online dissemination and imitation, further indicates that such performances can stimulate interest, recognition, and affective engagement with Thai cultural identity beyond institutional or educational settings.

From a cultural perspective, this phenomenon exemplifies soft power as defined through attraction rather than persuasion. Archaeological dance aesthetics, when translated into contemporary media, operate as symbolic resources that project national identity, artistic sophistication, and cultural continuity. Rather than presenting tradition as static or museum-bound, this adaptation reveals the enduring relevance and flexibility of archaeological dance as a living aesthetic system. In this sense, archaeological dances not only preserve historical knowledge but also actively contribute to the ongoing construction and global visibility of Thai cultural identity in the twenty-first century.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the shared aesthetic structure of the five Thai archaeological dance sets and to explore their cultural value from past to present. The findings demonstrate that, despite their association with distinct historical periods, the archaeological dances operate as a coherent aesthetic system rather than as a collection of isolated, period-specific works. This coherence is grounded in a unified conceptual framework that integrates historical research with choreographic design, musical composition, costume creation, and spatial organisation.

From an aesthetic perspective, the analysis confirms that the repertoire is structured around consistent design principles across four interrelated domains. Choreographically, specialised hand gestures and signature movement motifs derived from archaeological evidence function as symbolic devices that translate static visual forms into embodied performance. Musically, variation in instrumentation and tonal character is accommodated within a stable rhythmic structure, ensuring continuity of tempo and movement across the repertoire. Costume design balances archaeological reference with performative adaptation, while spatial organisation privileges symmetry, geometric clarity, and, in some cases, hierarchical staging that foregrounds principal performers. Taken together, these elements constitute an aesthetic structure that enables archaeological imagery to be transformed into a legible and unified performance language. Importantly, this study suggests that the significance of archaeological dances extends beyond their value as historically inspired performances. As a creative methodology, archaeological dance demonstrates how historical and archaeological data can be systematically reinterpreted through artistic practice without reducing heritage to static reconstruction. In this sense, archaeological dances challenge conventional perceptions of heritage preservation by positioning performance as an active mode of historical thinking rather than a passive form of representation.

In contemporary contexts, the continued circulation and adaptation of archaeological dance aesthetics further reveal their cultural value as a form of soft power. When historically informed movement vocabularies and visual motifs are recontextualised within global media, they retain recognisable aesthetic identifiers while engaging new audiences through affective and visual appeal. Such adaptations illustrate how archaeological dance operates as a living aesthetic system—one that is capable of mediating between historical authenticity, contemporary creativity, and global cultural exchange. Ultimately, this study argues that Thai archaeological

dances should be understood not merely as heritage performances rooted in the past, but as a foundational model for research-led creative practice in the performing arts. By decoding their shared aesthetic structure, the paper contributes to broader discussions on the relationship between archaeology, performance, and cultural continuity, and highlights the potential of dance as a dynamic medium for translating historical knowledge into contemporary artistic expression.

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