

CHARACTERS' TRANSFORMATION AND DISGUISE IN THAI CLASSICAL DANCE

Mananshaya Phetruchee*, Supavadee Potiwetchakul

**, ** Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand*

*E-mail: *mananshaya.ph@ssru.ac.th, **supavadee.po@ssru.ac.th*

**Corresponding Author e-mail: mananshaya.ph@ssru.ac.th*

ABSTRACT

The objective of this qualitative research was to examine the concept of characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance, primarily based on the Thai court drama literature of King Rama II. The author synthesized knowledge from texts, academic documents, self-training, experiences from teaching and performing, observation and expert interviews. The data were analyzed by criticism the inductive and deductive, analyzed by categorizing information, analytic induction, and verifying the validity of the findings with the experts. It was ascertained reliability and validity again with triangulation. The data were also presented by analytical description. The finding showed that, "disguise" refers to changing one's appearance by modifying their name, hairstyle, and clothing while keeping other traits such as voice, personality, and gender unchanged. On the other hand, "transformation" involves a complete change in all aspects of the character, including appearance, voice, personality, and gender. Transformation is often attributed to supernatural powers or gods and can occur at the cellular level. There are three stages to playing the role of a transformation character: before transforming, while transforming, and after successfully imitating the character. Characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance involve various elements that make the performance realistic and clear. These elements can be classified into eight things, which include: 1. Performance script, 2. Casting, 3. Songs and musical instruments, including sounds used in the performance, 4. Dance movement, 5. Performance space, 6. Performance props, 7. Costumes, and 8. Lighting. The transformation and disguise of the characters in Thai classical dance allow the creator of the dance to interpret and express the artist's vision in various ways. Many dance performances showcase unique styles and techniques. Makes the dance performances more beautiful, interesting, colorful, and popular for frequent performances. The audience enjoys watching their favorite artists dance and perform complex roles with intricate movements. It is a challenge for the artist to convey their character to the audience, especially when the role requires physical transformation and disguise. Despite the changes in appearance, the inner identity and emotions of the character remain the same. This transformation may occur at the cellular level and even across species, but the essence of the character *remains unchanged*.

Index Terms— transformation, disguise, Thai classical dance, King Rama II

INTRODUCTION

Thai classical dance refers to a performing art or form of creative activity that involves rhythmic body movement and performed in front of an audience. Such as Khon, Thai court drama, puppets, Likae, Nora, Mor Lam, Rabum, Ram, Fon, Searng etc. Those belonging to the royal court style and those for the public. (Koanantakul, 1991) In the Copyright enactment 1994, Thai classical dance includes to work that involves dancing, authentic dancing, acting, or acting that makes up a story and pantomime. Therefore, Thai dance has a comprehensive meaning, including all forms of Thai performing arts. Incidentally, this article *Thai classical*

dance refers only to the Khon and Thai court drama performances of the Fine Arts Department, which are performed at the royal court only.

Khon and Thai court drama are performances that tell a story, and it is generally known that Khon performs the Ramayana. And Thai court drama has many stories that are shown. One interesting thing is Characters' transformation and disguise are often found, and found in various types of dramatic performances such as Khon, Thai court drama, puppet etc. Stories that were performed include Ramakien, Inao, Da Lang, Sangthong, Kraithong, Maneepichai, Kavi, Suwanahong, Phra Aphai Mani, Kaew Na Ma, Rodtasen, Khun Chang Khun Phaen. The Characters' transformation and disguise often occurs at turning points in the story. Lead to the change of something. Characters usually have one purpose in disguising themselves. Or use supernatural powers to impersonate others or to carry out assigned duties. It makes the characters complex and interesting. When thinking about inventing a performance, a style was born. That encourages artists to interpret and express a variety of gestures.

Later, during the reign of King Buddha Lertla Napalai of Rattanakosin (King Rama II). Suraphon Wirunrak said, "It is an era of great leap forward for Siamese dance that has both quality and quantity. Because during the reign of King Buddha Lertla Napalai, there was development in Thai dance in many ways. That is, there is the development of excellence, the beauty of art, a new kind of drama, a new script, a new theatre, an increase in the number of people with knowledge and ability, a clear teaching system, and a set pattern. , Thai classical dance process has been standardized to be considered the basis for performance and transmission, there are opportunities for dance to be performed more and other plays to expand as well" (Wirunrak, 2004) During this reign, Nang Yai scripts, Khon scripts, and plays from outside the old capital were still commonly used. But His Majesty composed new plays, both internal and external plays, especially those that were fun to stage. And even during this reign, no one dared to perform it because it was a royal composition for a Thai court drama. But later these plays became a valuable legacy. and served as a model for many later non-Royal plays. Her Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanubhab assumed that His Majesty King Buddha Lertla Palai should have composed in the following order: 1. Chaiyachet 2. Sangthong 3. Kraithong 4. Maneepichai 5. Kawee. As for the Sangsilchai story, it is said that King Nang Klao, when he held the rank of Krom Muen Jessadabodin, wrote it and King Buddha Lertla Phalai edited it. Therefore, there are a total of 6 foreign plays from the reign of King Rama II that have continued from Ayutthaya. (Damrong Rajanubhab, HRH Prince, 2003) The interesting thing is in the poetry of his royal compositions. He created and selected almost every play in which the characters had transformation or disguise characteristics. Except for the plays Chaiyachet and Sangsilchai, no transformation or disguise of characters was found. This kind of royal popularity further reflects the popularity of creating plays with transformation or disguise characters. It reflects the interest of having similar ideas that have been passed down continuously. As well as the purpose of the story, it is often found that the transformation or disguise of the characters makes the story more fun. It is consistent with the concept of praising and worshiping the gods. It allows the creator of the dance to interpret. And it is another way for dancers to show off their skills to impress the audience.

The author interested in studying the elements of Characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance. As well as how to play the role of transformation and disguise characters. Especially the Characters' transformation and disguise that appear in the dance performances of the Dance Office of the Fine Arts Department. This includes male characters, female characters, giants, and monkeys. Each character has a prominent role in the story, has patterns, and methods, including complex emotional expressions. The content of data used in the research study is dances created from the Thai court drama literature of King Rama II. The characters are forged in 6 stories, including Ramayana, Inao, Manipichai, Sangthong, Kraithong, and Kawee. Which were staged at the National Theater between 1933 and 2021.

The benefit of this study is the knowledge about the Characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance that is studied in the form of collectivism. It is the discovery of new knowledge or original research that no one has studied before (knowledge gaps), which is beneficial to the academic and Thai classical dance acknowledgment. It can be used mainly in the creation and impersonation of invented characters. Including using it to create new dance, textbooks, books for research, reference, and teaching and learning of Thai dance in higher education institutions. To increase the amount of written academic work even more. Another benefit of this study is that it contributes to the elaboration of the concept of character impersonation in Thai drama, the elements of impersonation in Thai drama, and the methods of portraying the role of Characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance. Especially the dances created from the Thai court drama literature of King Rama II. An era of great jumps for Siamese dance with both quality and quantity.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this qualitative research was to examine the concept of characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance, primarily based on the Thai court drama literature of King Rama II.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The author synthesized knowledge from texts, academic documents, self-training, experiences from teaching and performing, observation and expert interviews. The data were analyzed by criticism the inductive and deductive, analyzed by categorizing information, analytic induction, and verifying the validity of the findings with the experts. It was ascertained reliability and validity again with triangulation. The data were also presented by analytical description.

RESULT

The finding showed that: Humans in the past believed in the power of supernatural beings, as Suraphon Wirunrak (Wirunrak, 2004) said, "When various natural phenomena occur, they all believe that humans make mistakes. and was punished by God. Therefore, performing rituals to please the gods is something that should be done. And the elements in those rituals include the arts of music and dance." Her Royal Highness Prince Damrong Rajanupab explains the belief in the power of God beings and leads to the causes of Indian dances that have had an impact on Thailand. "Because the Indians consider dancing to be something that God invented and taught to people to dance for good fortune. Anyone who dances or has dancing according to the divine commandment believes that it will benefit and will lead to happiness ahead." (Damrong Rajanubhab, HRH Prince, 2003) This statement is consistent with the ancient Greek dramatic and religious culture dating back to the middle of the 5th century BC. "Greek drama is related to the religion of the Greek people. Greek beliefs and religion developed from the relationship of various groups of gods. The Greeks believed that the gods could protect them and could foreshadow their future". (Suphassetthasiri, 2002) These ideas are expressed in every culture around the world. Humans in the past believed in the power of gods beings, which led to them praising and worshiping the gods in various ways. It is reflected through the dance performances. Which was found to be the origin of ancient cultures such as Greece, India, and China, as well as dance performances in Southeast Asia. Each has a culture of creating plays that are often stories based on supernatural imagination, consisting of stories of miraculous performances or events in which characters have the power to fly, have magic that can conjure

objects, have enormous strength, and have power. Inspires physical visions or can transform into other characters. Get what you desire, these are the qualities of the gods. As Katrina Angthongkamnerd summed up: The qualities of the gods are Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence. (Angthongkamnerd, 2013) And the culture of creating plays that are often stories based on supernatural imagination. It contains stories of supernatural mysteries that originate in the praise and worship of invisible gods. To pray for things that one wishes to get, to worship for sacred things to bless or make one happy and prosperous, it is an action that has been passed down continuously for a long time according to the beliefs of each religious sect. (Lakhonkhet, 2017)

One of the miraculous powers of the gods is transform or the use of supernatural powers to transform others in a different appearance. It was not only the gods who used their supernatural power to transform themselves as they wished. Ordinary humans without supernatural powers can also disguise themselves to become another person by changing their name or clothing to conceal their identity. It is often found in dances where characters are disguised. Especially in important events that are turning points in the story, being the trigger that causes doubt or conflict in the event, faking characters to eliminate problems, resolve situations, or prevent others from doubting themselves, to prevent danger. When traveling, disguising one's character to hide one's identity. It makes the show more enjoyable and has a twisted storyline that makes you follow along. There are 2 levels of character spoofing: the level of character change that only changes the appearance, such as changing the name, changing the hairstyle, and clothing to other characteristics. The appearance, voice, personality, and gender remain the same. (disguise) And all character changes such as cross-species, including the appearance, voice, personality, and gender. Changes at the cellular level are changes all. This is a transform of a character in a supernatural manner. It is usually caused by the power of the gods or supernatural powers.

Stories of fictional characters can be found in both Western and Eastern literary works. In the western world such as A play on the festival honoring the Greek god Dionysus. It is the story of a mythology that arose and developed as early as 534 BCE. (Suphassetthasiri, 2002) In the Eastern world, for example One of Manipur's performances Also known as jagoi, which is one of the important performances. It is a classical Indian dance form, the Bajikar Vesh. It tells of Lord Krishna transforming into an acrobat to meet Radha. He played a ball game with his friends. He also performed acrobatics for Lady Ratha to admire to please her. (Dilokwanich, 2000) Including Chinese opera performances that have their origins since the 11th century. They also bring stories in which the characters are forged and adapted into scripts for performance. Including stories that Thai people are familiar with, such as the story of Sai Yu, the White Snake Queen, and the Yang family warlords. Dances around the world demonstrate the popularity of transformation and disguise characters in plays. And there is a similar origin of the concept in every ancient civilization in every corner of the world. Interest leads to the purpose of creating a narrative that often finds the transformation and disguise characters.

Characteristics of the transformation and disguise characters appearing in the plays of King Buddha Lertla Napalai. There are both miraculous counterfeiting and non-miraculous counterfeiting. The most common form of supernatural transformation is in the Ramayana writings. Of the 3,128 poems, it was found that characters were transformation using supernatural powers 33 times. And it was a transformation of characters at the cellular level. That is, all changes, even the smallest units in the body. It means changing from one type of living being to another. For example, changing from a giant to an elephant, changing from a monkey to a gossamer. And the character who transform himself the most is Hanuman. Because they were assigned missions and played the greatest role in the war. In addition to the Ramayana, transformation using supernatural powers have been found in almost every other royal play. Found both counterfeiting myself. For example, Ong Patarakahala transforms into

a deer and peacock in Inao, and Phanthurat transforms into a human woman in the story of the Sang Thong. Others transformation and disguise, such as Ong Patarakahala who disguised Busaba to become Unakarn. Reading the given mantra. For example, Nang Yo Phra Klin transformed into a Brahmin to get revenge. And transformed back into herself to test the love of Phra Mani Phichai in Mani Phichai's story, Hononwichai transformed himself into Phra Dabos in Kawee's story. and the use of magical items, such as the Phra Sang changing his body by wearing the Head of a Ngea in the story of the Sangthong. Or Wimala maintained her human form because Krai Thong consecrated a ring and put it in her hair bun and repeated the talisman in Krai Thong's story.

As for disguise that does not use supernatural powers, changing names, titles, and styles of dress. For example, Inao disguise to be Panyee, Siyatra disguise to be Ya Ran in Inao's story, Thao Sawimon and Mrs. Chandevi disguise to be villagers in Sang Thong. Many linguists have therefore tried to find out the meaning of the transformation and disguise of characters in Thai literature. This has resulted in literary dance and dance performances as well. Because the word transformation and disguise are the same word in Thai but has two different meanings. In addition, the word "transformation and disguise" in the 1999 Royal Institute Dictionary has a broad meaning. The poet can use the word "transformation and disguise" to have two different meanings. The use of the same word to have two different meanings is caused by Poetic license. And it comes from a wide meaning of the word transformation and disguise as the author mentioned above.

When we consider body transformations based on the character's origin, we can classify them into four types:

1. Characters who were born as animals can transform into other animals, or transform into giants, or even transform into another living creature.
2. Characters who were born as giants and can transform into angels, or transform into humans, or even transform into animals.
3. Characters who were born as angels and can transform into animals.
4. Characters who were born as humans and can transform into other humans or other living creatures.

The Thai court drama literature of King Rama II. come to a various form of dance. Especially, Khon performances and Thai court drama. It was found that Characters' transformation and disguise appears in various types of dances. There is a systematic sequence of transformation and disguise algorithms. For example, at the beginning the purpose or mission of the physical transformation or disguise must be stated. Then there is the Na Phat dance used for physical transformation, which has a specific and clear pattern. When the physical transformation is complete, the mission or journey will be mentioned to fulfill the mission. which will contain singing songs and Na Phat to correspond with the characteristics of the Characters' transformation and disguise. As has been said all along: The transformation and disguise of the characters allow the creator of the dance to interpret and express the artist's vision in various ways. Many dance performances showcase unique styles and techniques. Makes the dance performances more beautiful, interesting, colorful, and popular for frequent performances. The audience enjoys watching their favorite artists dance and perform complex roles with intricate movements. It is a challenge for the artist to convey their character to the audience, especially when the role requires physical transformation and disguise. Despite the changes in appearance, the inner identity and emotions of the character remain the same. This transformation may occur at the cellular level and even across species, but the essence of the character remains unchanged.

Characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance involve various elements that make the performance realistic and clear. These elements can be classified into eight things, which include: 1. Performance script, 2. Casting, 3. Songs and musical instruments, including sounds used in the performance, 4. Dance movement, 5. Performance space, 6. Performance props, 7. Costumes, and 8. Lighting.

As previously mentioned, there has been a growing trend of creating plays that involve characters undergoing transformation and disguise in various cultures, particularly in Thai classical dances. These transformations often serve to convey cultural transfer and the purpose of the story. The author concludes that Characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance holds great importance for two reasons. Firstly, it helps in the progression of the story. Characters' transformation and disguise is a tool used by poets to create misunderstandings, test the opponent's heart, achieve desired outcomes, and make the story interesting and engaging from beginning to end. It affects the course of the story as it usually occurs at turning points that lead to changes. Secondly, characters are often disguised to solve problems, correct situations, protect against travel hazards, conceal true identities for ulterior motives, or disguise others with supernatural powers. The twisted storyline of such characters makes the show enjoyable and interesting to follow. The second point to consider is the significance of characters' transformation and disguise when adapting a script into different forms of dance, particularly Khon performances and Thai court drama. Counterfeiting is a prevalent element in various types of dances, and there is a typical sequence of steps involved in it. The transformation and disguise of characters in Thai classical dance is important as it allows the creator to interpret and present the artist in various ways. This results in unique and beautiful dance performances with different styles and finesse. It's more interesting and popular to showcase the same characters played by different artists or the same artist playing the same role at different times and days.

Therefore, the study of the elements and techniques used to portray these transformations in Thai classical dance is of great interest. Characters' transformation and disguise in Thai classical dance is the concept of impersonation of characters in Thai dance that is academic in nature. There are elements of the show that have a clear plan. There is a way to express the character's role as a process. Be sensitive. There is a tradition and practice that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is wisdom that creates beauty and value.

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