

The Study of Using Mon Dance in Pathum Thani Province's Tradition

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Abstract—This investigation is focused on using of Mon dance in Pathum Thani Province's tradition and has the following objectives: 1) to study the background of Mon dance in Pathum Thani Province; 2) to study Mon dance in Pathum Thani Province; and 3) to study of using Mon dance in Pathum Thani province's tradition. This qualitative research was conducted in Pathum Thani province (in the central of Thailand). Data was collected from documentary study and field data by means of observation, interview, and group discussion. Workshops were also held with a total of 100 attendees, comprised of 20 key informants, 40 casual informants and 40 general informants. Data was validated using the triangulation technique and the findings are presented using the descriptive analysis. The results of the study show that the historical background of Mon dance in Pathum Thani Province initiated during the war evacuation from Martaban (south of Burma) to settle down in Sam Khok, Pathum Thani Province in Ayutthaya period to Rattanakosin. The study found that Mon dance typically consists of 12-13 dancing process. The melodies have 12-13 songs. Piphat Mon (Mon traditional music ensemble) is used in the performance. Performers are dressed in Mon traditional costumes. The performers are 6-12 women and depending on the employer's demands. Length of the performance varies from the duration of music orchestration. Rituals and customs performed are paying homage to teachers before the performance. The offerings are composed of flowers, incense sticks, candles, money gifts which are well arranged on a tray with pedestal, and also liquors, tobaccos and pure water for asking propitiousness. For the use of Mon dance in Pathum Thani Province's tradition, it is found that the dance is commonly performed in the funeral ceremonial tradition at present because the physical postures of the performance are considered graceful and exquisite. In addition, as for its value, it has long been believed since the ancient times that Mon dance was a sacred thing considered as the dignity and glorification especially for funeral ceremonies of priest or royal hierarchy classes. However, Mon dance has continued to be used in the traditions associated with Mon people activities in Pathum Thani Province for instance customary welcome for honor guest and Songkran festival.

Keywords—Mon dance, traditions, Pathum Thani Province.

I. INTRODUCTION

TRADITION is what commonly practiced successively until it becomes a pattern in society as culture, arts, costumes, and religious beliefs. The origin of society comes from traditions where different ethnicities are cultivated in the mind from one generation to another, with the improvement of the changing environment and values. Once the tradition is well recognized, it eventually becomes a norm for members of society to follow. It is called the tradition or custom [1].

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For the performing arts, especially the dance, it is regarded as esthetic that uplifts the heart and mind of the people; it symbolizes the identity of a nation, characterized by behaviors successively practiced and adhered. The dance is what we create with meticulous craftsmanship, and exquisite beauty to provide entertainment to those who enjoy it, so much that they also share the emotion and feeling with the performers. Dance relies on a number of elements, such as dance movement, costumes, musical instruments as well as musical melodies. Dance is considered to be a tradition and a branch of fine arts. On occasions, the dance is part of rituals for healing and dispelling evils such as that commonly practiced by villagers in the northeastern part of Thailand, a dance performed at Hindu shrines to worship the Hindu gods as commonly practiced in India [2] or a dance in the parade of candles celebrating Buddhist lent in Northeastern Thailand.

Mon dance is a dance of Mon people with a long history of unique way of life, language, customs, traditions, and culture. At present, there is no country of Mons on the world map; they still maintain a distinct identity, strong determination, lifestyle, language, customs, traditions, and culture, despite their long departure from their original homeland.

Thai people call Mons as "*Mon*", referring to a people that lived in the Suvanabhumi region, while Europeans and Arabs called Mons "*Talains*" an assumedly corrupted word for "*Taleng Kauna*" the name one of states in India. The first settlement of Mon people was in Satoem state; later they established Mon nation in Hanthawaddi. Burmese invaded the area and Mons lost Hanthawaddi to Burmese around the year 1757. Since then Mon people eventually became a people without a country. Some groups did not want to be under the rule of Burma, so they migrated to be under the royal protection of the kings in Thailand starting from Ayutthaya period during the reign of King Naresuan (1590). Most of them settled in Samkhoke area in Pathum Thani, Koh Kret in Nonthaburi and Phra Pradaeng in Samut Prakarn. Mons who immigrated during that time is called the "*Old Mon*". Later in the reign of King Taksin (1774), Phraya Jaeng, ruler of Mohlamlerng had settled in Nonthaburi and they were called the "*New Mon*" in the early Rattanakosin (Bangkok) period. In the reign of King Rama II (1815), the king graciously allowed Mon people to settle in the town of Pathum Thani, Nonthaburi, and Nakhon Khuenkhan (Phra Pradaeng). Later King Rama III (1824) graciously granted Mon people to settle along the Chao Phya River, outside the premises of the City Walls around Chana Songkhram temple. Meanwhile, the Mon community had settled in Koh Kret since the Thonburi period, the immigration being led by Phraya Jaeng, the army leader of

Mons. Mon Kwan Aman family and families of musicians and dancers followed to settle in this area.

Most Mon people are followers of Buddhism, along with the belief in ancestral spirits, household spirits and other supernatural beings, and such beliefs cause them to embrace diverse traditions, particularly in their life passage from birth to death. This phenomenon can be seen in such traditions as “*Kon Phom Fai*” shaving the hair of the baby, “*Kon Phom Juk*” (shaving the hair when a child reach 11-13 years of age), becoming monkhood, funeral ceremony and various Buddhist festivals and lent and the water festival of Songkran.

For the performing arts and dance performance, Mon people still regard these activities as part of their traditional and cultural way of life. The traditions and culture are indispensable and expressive as part of the rituals during the festivals. Songkran festival does not only feature merit making and the freeing of birds and fish, festival goers also play traditional games and join in the traditional Mon dance. Mon dance is also performed in a ritual welcoming of dignitaries and expressing gratitude for their visit. The dance is performed for persons of high social status and respects such as priests at their funeral. The ritual is considered auspicious in inviting the souls of the dead and in celebrating their entry to heaven.

At present, however, Mon dance has gone through much transformation in terms of form and dance style as well as performance traditions. From documentary study, research works, observations, interviews and field study in Pathum Thani Province, it is found that Mon dance has changed considerably, in particular the way in which Mon dance is used in various festivals. This particular author has been keen in doing research on the topic in the application of Mon dance in traditions and festivals in Pathum Thani Province.

II. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study aimed to investigate the history of Mon dance in Pathum Thani, to study Mon dance in Pathum Thani and to examine the festivals and traditions where the traditional Mon dance is used as part of the events in Pathum Thani Province. The researcher has employed the qualitative research method in this study by collecting and analyzing data from documents and field data, details of which are the following:

A. Research Scope

The scope of this study consisted of the content of the research specified in the objectives, which include the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and obstacles in order to contribute to the solution.

B. Research Methodology

This study utilized the qualitative research method, where data were analyzed from document study and field data were collected from field surveys, interviews, observations, focus group discussions and the derived data were analyzed accordingly.

C. Research Area

District areas in Pathum Thani were identified for the study, i.e. Mueang District, Samkhoke District and other districts where a large number of Thai citizens of ethnic Mon reside and where residents are still active in Mon traditions, particularly in the activity of Mon dance.

D. Population

Residents of Pathum Thani, who are associated with the traditions and Mon dance.

E. Sample

The sample for the study consisted of 100 sampling and non-sampling informants divided into 3 groups, comprising 20 experts in the fields, 40 persons associated with the Mon dance performance and 40 general informants.

F. Instruments

The instruments used in the study include a survey form, participatory and non-participatory observation forms, structured and non-structured interview schedules, in-depth interview schedule and group discussion form.

G. Data Collection

The data consistent with and deliverable to the research objectives were collected by the researcher.

H. Data Management

The data obtained from the literature and data from the field study were sorted into categories in accordance with the research objectives. Data from document study were thoroughly studied in details and placed into categories. Data from field study collected from preliminary survey, observations, interviews and group discussion were recorded electronically, transcribed and finally placed into categories. Conclusions were made on the issues under study. If the information required further verification, it had to be rechecked in the field again for accuracy. The data collected from the documents and information gathered from preliminary field observations, interviews and focus groups were verified for accuracy and completeness and the reliability and consistency of the information by using the triangulation technique [3] in order to prove that the data gather was correct or not. The triangulation technique was used to determine the sources of the data. This is to ensure the consistency of the data. The time source determined whether data obtained from different points in time were the same or not. The place source indicated whether data from different settings were the same or not. Finally, the people source compared the data from the people with different viewpoints.

I. Data Analysis

The data obtained from documents and information obtained from field observations, interviews and group discussions were analyzed for conclusions.

J. Presentation of Data Analysis

Presentation of the findings and discussions were presented using the descriptive analysis technique. The analysis was

made based on the theoretical framework and presented with visual illustrations.

III. RESULTS

Analysis of the data in terms of the historical objective of Mon dance in Pathum Thani from documents and field data, interviews with the experts in the subject, with informants involved with the performance and with general informants, reveal that Mons, who fled the war in Burma since Ayutthaya period and Bangkok period (1590-1824), had established their settlements around Samkhoke in Pathum Thani. The place where they settled is called Puahapel, referring to drum dance (*Ram Tapone*) in Mon language. In this particular dance, dancers pay attention to the beat of the percussion instrument called "*Tapone*" (two-sided drum).

As for Mon dance in Pathum Thani, its features can be classified into 6 aspects. The dance movement of Mon dance features unique styles, i.e. the slow dance rhythm through foot movement without lifting a foot from the ground. Dance styles are normally performed with 12-13 postures. For the aspect of musical melody, originally 10 songs were played in order. The first melody is called *Plahtua* or *Yark Jang Hapel*, followed by *Kapah San*, *Comtho*, *Khawautua*, *Khawuakhanom*, unnamed melody, *Ayan* or *Sadyad* or *Kawatua*, *Hawai*, *Miangplaihahia* and *Pakmiah*, respectively. Later two Thai traditional melodies have been added to the performance, altogether a total of 12-13 musical melodies. The musical band accompanying the dance is the Mon orchestra, which is divided into 3 categories: Mon orchestra with five instruments, Mon orchestra with double instruments and grand Mon orchestra, with an extra number of instruments depending on the performance occasions and the hiring contract agreed upon. Mon orchestra consists of such instruments as Mon, alto oboe, soprano bamboo xylophone, soprano metallophone, alto bamboo xylophone, alto metallophone, large gong circle, small gong circle, Mon two-sided drum, a set of Burmese hand drums, and 3 gongs (for large Mon orchestra). The types of costumes worn by the dancers follow those of Mon dress styles, depending largely on the occasions or events. Costumes with bright colors are worn by the performers at the auspicious occasions. However, for the inauspicious occasions like the funeral ceremony, dancers are dressed in black, wearing hair in bun or coil and round necked cylindrical sleeved blouses and vertical striped sarongs, and with shoulder scarves. Performers normally consist of a troupe of 6-12 female dancers or more, depending on the nature of activities and agreement made between the performing troupe and the hirer for the occasion. Dance duration does not cover the 12-13 musical melodies like in the past due to current tight schedule situation. Normally it takes 20-30 minutes to perform the dance with the complete 12-13 musical melodies. Most performances show only the dance with 1 or 2 melodies for 5-10 minutes. Rituals associated with the dance are practiced in the following manners: Prior to the performance, the ritual traditions require the dancers to pay homage to teachers seeking auspiciousness for the performance. This is done through bestowing them with offerings such as flowers,

incenses, candles, petty cash, traditional trays, whisky, cigarettes and water. During the performance at the inauspicious occasions, e.g. the funeral ceremony, the show starts with the dancers prostrating the Buddhist monks 3 times, and give "*Wai*" gesture to the dead, the musical instruments and to the audience one time each. Then the dance continues, and once it is finished, the dancers show "*Wai*" to the dead one more time. It is noted that in the auspicious ceremony, dancers show their respect to the audience before and after the performance. Other rituals and traditions associated with Mon dance include the prohibition in walking over the costumes or other dance ornaments and accessories such as a crown; it is believed that such dance items belong to the dance masters which should be given due respects. Particularly prohibited is the use of petty cash reward for personal purposes; the cash should be used for merit-making dedicated to the teachers.

An analysis of the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat in the use of traditional Mon dance in festivals in Pathum Thani Province reveal that problems that should be rectified most is the movement of the dance, which is rather slow and time consuming, i.e. 20-30 minutes per performance. Mon dance requires the cooperation from both public and private sectors in the preservation of this traditional dance. The strength of the dance is its uniqueness while the weakness is the lack of development of novel performing formats. Opportunity and threat are reflected in the fact that Mon dance cannot be used as a performance at all traditions and festivals. Improvement and modification can be made through cooperation from all parties in the conservation, development, and creation which contribute to the sustainable use of Mon dance in the festivals and traditions of Pathum Thani.

IV. DISCUSSION

On the issue of the history of Mon dance in Pathum Thani, it is found that Mons started their migration to make new settlements since Ayutthaya and the Bangkok period. They left Mottama in Burma to a new settlement in Samkhoke Pathum Thani about 300 years ago [4].

On the issue of Mon dance in Pathum Thani, it is found that the topic is divided into six areas: 12-13 dance movements; 12-13 musical melodies using instrument in Mon orchestra accompanying the dance; costumes worn in Mon dressing styles; performers consisting mostly of female dancers; dance duration depending on the melody and music, normally about 5-7 minutes per melody; and rituals associated with the dance consisting of the pre-show, during the show and the post-show rituals. This finding is consistent with the concepts of Prathin Puangsamlee [5], noting the importance of dance elements in demonstrating the rich cultural prosperity. Dance is an art which has value in itself. The beauty of the dance depends on several elements. The parties involved with the dance performance must understand the various elements thoroughly, i.e. dance movement, costume, musical melody, dance style, and place of performance. In this context, it is also consistent with the aesthetic theory advocated by Alexander Gottrib Buamgaten [6] stating that aesthetics is the beauty that exists in nature and is the work of human

creativity, which comes from the sensory perception. Therefore, to acquire full understanding of beauty, one can achieve it through sensory emotions, creation meaning, feelings, and persons [1].

Mon dance is performed at two types of traditions and festivals in Pathum Thani. For the auspicious occasions, the dance is performed at Songkran festival, house warming celebration or a ceremony welcoming dignitaries and visitors. At the inauspicious occasions, the dance is normally performed at a funeral ceremony. The rationale behind such introduction is that Mon dance features a slow dance movement and a graceful dance style, which fits the solemn atmosphere of the occasion. Mon dance has been recognized since ancient times for its traditional high value performing art form and a symbol of honor for the deceased. The dance is performed at the funeral ceremony of the high ranking priests and the aristocrats. This is consistent with the concept explained by Patcharin Somhom [7] which states that the traditions and rituals form the process of religious symbol used to bind society together, thus reflecting the role and significance of the commonly shared traditions and creating a sense of social commitment.

V. CONCLUSION

The research entitled "*The study of using Mon dance in Pathum Thani Province's tradition*" has resulted in different aspects of information. The study reveals that the traditional Mon dance in Pathum Thani can be traced back during the time of war when Mon fled their homeland in *Mottama* to settle down at a place called "*Samkhoke*" in Pathum Thani province. Mon immigrants have brought with their traditions and culture, which at present are still visible and preserved rigorously from one generation to another, particular the traditional Mon dance. Although the dance has gone through transformation to some extent, it remains to be seen as a unique identity of Mons. Traditionally, Mon dance has been performed in Pathum Thani at an auspicious occasion; however, the current popularity of Mon dance finds its way to an inauspicious occasion as well, such as at the funeral ceremony. This is due to the fact Mon dance, with its slow dance movement, is considered graceful and with musical melodies suitable for mourning. In fact, Mon dance is still popular among the Thais and those of Mon descent in Pathum Thani and nearby provinces. In addition to the information attained, the researcher also sees the benefits from the awareness and recognition of value of the traditions and culture which have spread from the outside and combined with the local tradition and culture in a perfect manner without causing conflicts or problems. This is a testimony to the humanity that despite the differences in terms of ethnicity, tradition and culture, man always wants to lead a happy and peaceful life.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

The private sector and those involved with Mon dance tradition cooperate in the conservation, development and

creativity of the dance in order for it to be used in the traditions and festivals in Pathum Thani Province.

Schools in Pathum Thani should also provide the local curriculum courses in Mon dance to be taken by students in order to provide a proper learning and a pride in the local performing arts among students.

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