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ทำดีตามพ่อ
ตามรอยพระราชา
*Performing Good Deeds
Following in His Late Majesty
King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Footsteps.*

Thai Classical Dance

By

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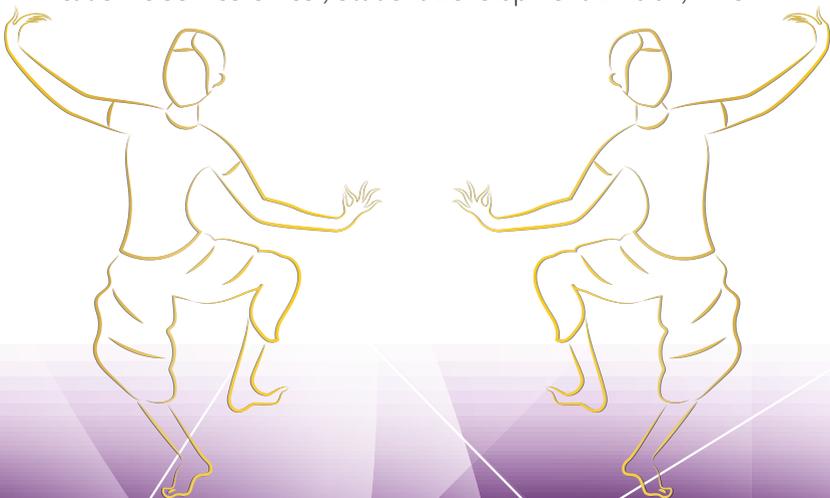
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ทำดีถวายพ่อ
ตามรอยพระเจ้า

*Performing Good Deeds
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THAI DANCE : CLASSICAL, FOLK AND REGIONAL DANCES OF THAILAND

Dance in Thailand is the main dramatic art form of Thailand. Thai dance, like many forms of traditional Asian dance, can be divided into two major categories that correspond roughly to the high art (classical dance) and low art (folk dance) distinction. Although traditional Thai performing arts are not as actively embraced as they once were, suffering from competition from modern and western entertainments and generally changing tastes, Thai dance is still very much alive. It is an integral part of the culture of Thailand at all levels. Royal patronage of classical forms of dance has preserved some dances in their original form for centuries. Rural people have their own forms of folk dance, collectively known as rabam phun muang.

Hand movement is very important in Thai Dance. Sometimes women dancers wear strange looking brass finger nails that exaggerate these hand movements. Anna Leonowens, the 19th century governess who inspired the musical 'The King and I', wrote, "the dancers arms and fingers curved in seemingly impossible flexure and the muscles of their bodies were agitated like the fluttering of leaves in a soft breeze." A particularly amazing feat is performed when the dancers curve their fingers backwards all the way to the back of their hands.

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Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen, an expert on Asian dance at the Finnish Theatre Academy, wrote: “There are several terms in the Thai language referring to different types of dance: natsin refers to classical Thai dance, whereas rabam phun muang refers to folk dances. The ancient word rabam by itself refers to “choreographed dances for specific functions and occasions”, whereas a similarly ancient term ten indicates “dancing with emphasis on the hand movements.” According to conservative estimates, there are over a hundred different dance traditions in Thailand. Many of these are archaic dance rituals or folk dances, belonging to the heritage of ethnic minorities. The traditions can be roughly classed into four main groups: the above described central, northern, northeastern and southern styles. In all Thai dancing, the emphasis is on the movements of the arms, hands and fingers. [Source:Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen, Asian Traditional Theater and Dance, Theatre Academy Helsinki, xip.fi/atd/thailand/early-periods]

“The local traditions, however, differ in style. The Central Thai style, is canonised in manuals, of which the earliest existing are the early Bangkok period manuals preserved at the National Library of Thailand. The northeastern style of the regions of Isaan incorporates fewer finger movements compared with the classical style or the dynamic southern nora dance, which is characterised by a very open leg-position and expressive finger movements. The northern style of the former Tai kingdom of Lanna is often slow in a legato-like manner. Traditionally, the classical style of Central Thailand has dominated Thai dance, dictating the standards according to which other dance styles have been adapted and developed in universities and art colleges. Recently, however, there seems to be going on a kind of revival of local styles, which are now also studied and interpreted in their more original forms.

(Bunditpatanasilpa Institute’s Fine Arts Department)

Book: International Encyclopedia of Dance, editor Jeane Cohen, six volumes, 3,959 pages, \$1,250, Oxford University Press, New York. It took 24 years to prepare.

See Separate Article on THAI THEATER AND THE PERFORMING ARTS IN THAILAND: KHON, LAKHON LIKAY “FOLK OPERETTA” AND PUPPET THEATER



Early Thai Dance History and Images

The Theravada Buddhist cosmology “The Three Worlds” (Traiphum), attributed to the 14th century King Lithai of Sukhothai, gives a detailed description of the 31 levels of the Theravada Buddhist cosmos. It mentions dance in several connections and deeply influenced the dance of the region. There are also early dance images in temple reliefs, which give us some information about dance during the early phases of the history of Thailand. They clearly show that many of the elements of dance reflected Indian influence while, at the same time, many features also show that the Indian influence had already been adapted to the local tastes and needs. [Source: Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen, *Asian Traditional Theater and Dance*, Theatre Academy Helsinki, xip.fi/atd/thailand/early-periods]

Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen of the Finnish Theatre Academy wrote: ““One of the earliest of them is a Mon-period fragment of an 8th to 11th century stucco half-human half-bird mythical kinnari, which once formed a part of the decoration on a temple wall south of Sukhothai. It shows a winged female figure with prominent, crown-like headgear. Her body is bent in the exaggerated tribhanga position of Indian dance. Her right arm is thrown across the upper body and the left arm is uplifted and bent from the elbow.

“When one is familiar with the hand and finger movements of many Thai folk and classical dances, one can easily recognise similarities between them and the kinnari figure. Thai dances often emphasise the extremely elastic finger movements in which the fingers are excessively stretched backwards, an aesthetical and technical speciality with

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its own training methods. Thus the kinnari's upper hand could also be seen repeating this kind of movement. If this interpretation is correct, the kinnari figure, while echoing Indian and Sri Lankan traditions, also represents localisation of these traditions with its over-bent elbow and backwards-stretched fingers, both features typical of dances of this region still today. [Ibid]

“In the main entrance of a large temple compound, near Sukhothai, there are reliefs depicting dynamic dancers. They are shown in an Indian-influenced leg position with bent knees and with one raised foot. The arms are stretched wide open. Indigenous features, however, can also be recognised, as their over-bent elbow joints are clearly visible and their fingers are strongly bent backwards. [Ibid]

“One of the few dance images from the region of Sukhothai is a terracotta relief showing a dancing woman. It is dated to the 16th–17th centuries, i.e. to the period when Ayutthaya was the dominant centre of the Thai hegemony. There is no doubt that the pose of this female dancer is related to Indian-derived dance technique. The bent knees and the uplifted heels create an impression of dynamic footwork that is characteristic of many Indian dance traditions even today. The hands in front of the torso seem to portray an Indian-influenced mudra-like gesture. However, it is very likely that the image is not merely an iconographical loan from Indian tradition, since similar poses, with slight variations, can also be found in Khmer dance imagery, although executed in a different style. These reliefs could imply that a dance tradition incorporating this kind of poses could have spread to a larger area, covering the Khmer territory as well as the Central Plains of Thailand. [Ibid]

Regional Music, Dance and Performing Arts in Thailand

This in the central plains are primarily rice farmers who live along rivers and canals. They lead simple lives tilling the land and tending paddy fields. Their simple entertainment forms relate to the rice cycle or religious functions, as relief from hard work or to celebrate occasions such as the completion of a successful harvest. The events are joyful and entertaining, with rousing songs and joyous dances for everyone to enjoy, such as the Sickie Dance, or it may be a night of singing duets, when men and women sing humorous dialogues, to the accompaniment provided by folk instruments such as drums, cymbals, and sticks. [Source: Thailand Foreign Office, The Government Public Relations Department]

Moreover, there are classical performing art forms requiring high-level ability and dedicated training, such as the traditional music ensembles, the classical puppet theater, lakhon (stage play), and khon (classical masked dance), formerly presented as

entertainment in the royal court. Khon performances always feature episodes from the Ramakian, the Thai version of the Ramayana, which is clear evidence of Indian influence.

The northern dances are based on the folk style of the Lan Na Kingdom, highlighting the gentle and graceful movements of female dancers, normally in large groups, all clad in beautiful local garments, dancing to the rhythms of folk instruments. On the male side, their famous victory drum dance highlights their strength and boosts the morale of the people. It is performed by strong Thai men, who pound on the big drums with sticks and even various parts of their bodies, including their shoulders, elbows, kneecaps, and head.

The performing art of the Northerners is lively and fun-filled, such as the *soeng*, using various implements from the daily lives of the sticky-rice eaters as part of the show, such as *soeng kratip* (a dance with steamed rice containers), *soeng sawing* (fish traps), or *soeng yae khai mot daeng* (sticks for digging out eggs from ant nests). Along with being very entertaining, the dances provide insight into the traditional lifestyle of the people of Isan. A well-known Isan performance is *mo lam*, with male and female experts reciting stories to the tune of folk instruments played in ensembles, especially the reed pipe instrument, *kaen*; the one-string instrument, *phin*; and the wooden xylophone with the bars tied together in a row, *pong lang*. The *pong lang* is widely used in folk song recitation, folk dances, and other performances.

The performing arts of the South follow Buddhist and Muslim lines, the most popular performances being *nora* and *nang talung*, the shadow puppets, presented to the music of drums and flutes. *Nora* dancers are strenuously trained to synchronize gestures and movements harmoniously and in accordance with the changing rhythms. The *nora* dance is a classic art form of the South, with complicated gestures that require high flexibility from the dancers. The *nora* dance is also related to the stage performances in the central region.

In the small shadow puppet play, or *nang talung*, the figures are carved from ox hide, painted and decorated, and held up by actors behind a white cloth screen who are lit from behind, casting shadows on the screen. In the performance, each figure is moved by one master, and there are several narrators. The show reflects various events and happenings, some based on literature, and others on current events, the cultural, social, and political topics of the day. The figures and the performances represent the wisdom and excellence in art and culture acquired by the Southerners from their ancestors.

Classical Thai Dance and Dance Drama

Royal patronage of classical forms of dance (known as natsin) has preserved some dances in their original form for centuries. The two major forms of Thai classical dance drama are khon and lakon nai . In the beginning both were exclusively court entertainments and it was not until much later that a popular style of dance theater, Likay, evolved as a diversion for the common folk who had no access to royal performances.

Khon Dance is the most stylized form of Thai dance. It is performed by troupes of non-speaking dancers, the story being told by a chorus at the side of the stage. Choreography follows traditional models rather than attempting to innovate. Most khon performances feature episodes from the Ramakien. Costumes are dictated by tradition, with angels (both good and bad) wearing coloured masks.

Lakhon features a wider range of stories than khon, including folk tales and Jataka stories (stories of the Buddha and his previous lives). Dancers are usually female and perform as a group rather than representing individual characters.

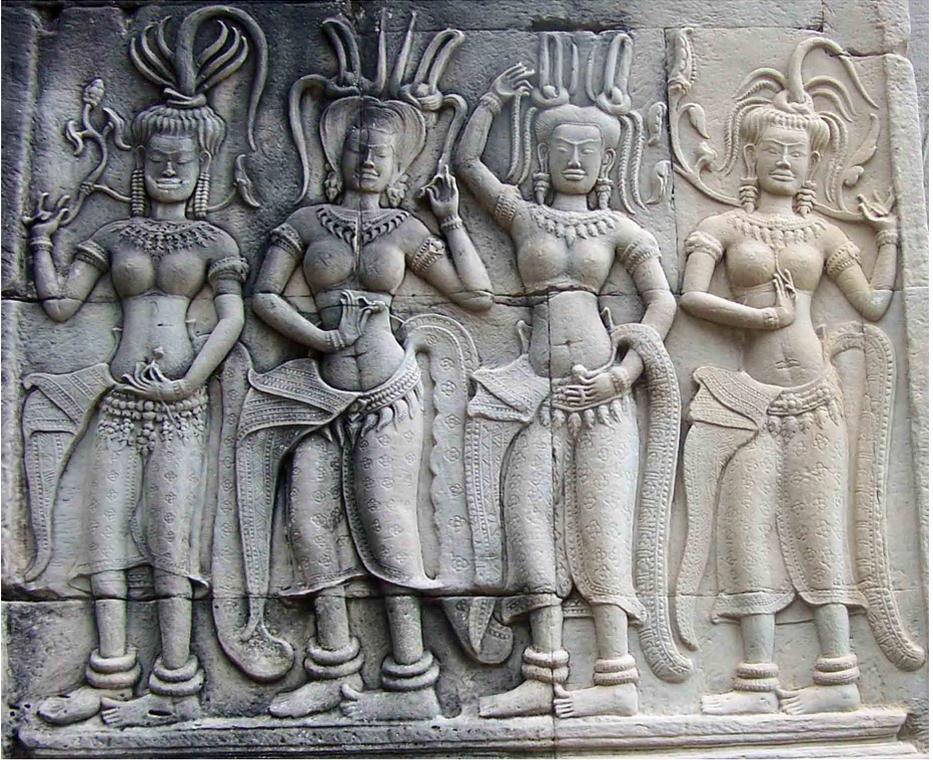
The classical central Thai style of dance has been maintained since of 1930s by the Witthayalai Natsin or College of Dance and Music with its several branches around the country, and by the National Theatre in Bangkok. The technique is canonised in manuals, of which the earliest existing are the early Bangkok period manuals preserved at the National Library of Thailand.

See Separate Article on THAI THEATER AND THE PERFORMING ARTS IN THAILAND: KHON, LAKHON LIKAY “FOLK OPERETTA” AND PUPPET THEATER

Early History of Classical Thai Dance

Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen of the Finnish Theatre Academy wrote: “The present Thai classical dance (natsin) probably developed during the Ayutthaya period (1350–1767), although very little is known about the process. Its roots can be deciphered by using the early dance images of the region, already discussed above, as archaeological source material. The possible origins of Thai dance may be found in the Khmer tradition as depicted in the dance images in the Khmer reliefs of Angkor and the Khmer-related reliefs of the Phimai temple in eastern Thailand. [Source: Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen, Asian Traditional Theater and Dance, Theatre Academy Helsinki xip.fi/atd/thailand/thai-classical-dance

“One source may be the Mon tradition, depicted in the few surviving Mon reliefs. One possible transmission route for this clearly Indian-influenced dance technique could also have been South Thailand with its connections with Sri Lanka and the Srivijaya Empire.



There may also be the possibility that the dance tradition was brought from India direct to the regions of Thailand by Indian Brahman gurus. This last possibility is supported by the fact that many dance-related key terms still used in the Thai language, such as *nata* (classical dance) and *kru* (guru), stem from Sanskrit and are related to India's *Natyashastra* dance and theatre manual (*Natasatra* in Thai). Furthermore, a Sanskrit manuscript of a *Natyashastra* manual can be found in the National Library of Thailand. [Ibid]

“The present classical Thai dance surely developed during the Ayutthaya period, but very little is known about this process. According to the Thai scholar Mattani Rutnin the classical court dance tradition declined towards the end of the Ayutthaya period, but the remains of the tradition were, nevertheless, carried over to the court of the new capital by two Ayutthaya princesses. The formulation of the present style took place during the reign of Rama I (1782–1809). The standards were set by the principal master of the Royal Lakhon troupe, Chaofa Krom Phra Phithakmontri, who is still worshipped as one of the great masters of dance in a traditional *wai kru* invocation ceremony, which will be discussed later. [Ibid]

“Thus, standardisation of the dance technique happened exactly simultaneously with the rewriting of the Ramakien and with the creation of the dynastic Rama cult of the Bangkok period. It is no wonder that the sub-techniques of classical Thai dance are classified according to the characters portrayed in the Ramakien. The first group, the noble humans, are divided into major heroes (Phra Ram), minor heroes (Phra Lak), major heroines (Nang Sida), and finally to minor heroines (Montho). It is interesting to note that even the names of the role categories are taken from the Ramkien’s principal figures. The second group consists of demon characters (yak), and the third monkeys (ling), both also central to the Ramakien.” [Ibid]

Thai dance technique and its repertoire were also adopted in Cambodia during the long period of Thai domination which had already started in the 14th century and ended in 1907, when the Thais returned the province of Siem Reap (where Angkor is located) to the Cambodians. Dance masters from the Thai court are known to have trained the Cambodian Royal ballet even during the period of Rama I (1782–1809), and the co-operation of the Cambodian and Thailand’s National dance companies still continues today.

Thai Classical Dance Technique and Training

Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen of the Finnish Theatre Academy wrote: “Dance students usually start their training between eight and ten years of age. In the first phase all of them study the fundamental series of movements, the so-called “slow movements” (phleng cha) and “fast movements” (phleng reo). They then proceed to study the basic movement patterns for each role type corresponding to the individual student’s physique. Heroes should be well proportioned and stately in bearing, demons athletic, while monkeys should be short and acrobatic. [Source:Dr. Jukka O. Miettinen, Asian Traditional Theater and Dance, Theatre Academy Helsinki, xip.fi/atd/thailand/early-periods]

For the refined characters (Phra and Nang) there were originally 108 basic movements, but later they were reduced to 68 movements in the major movement series (mae bot yai) and to 18–20 in the smaller series (mae bot lek). The dance of heroes and heroines represents Thai classical dance in its most complex form. It makes full use of the meaningful and elegant hand gestures, echoing the Indian mudras. The steps are light. The bare soles of the feet rarely touch the ground, while the toes are often turned upwards. As in India and in most South-East Asian traditions, bare footedness is a ritual feature, as the stage and the actual performance are regarded as sacred.

The demi pliè (lim) of the legs permits the characteristic flexibility of movement, the shifting of weight from one side to the other, and the small, jerky accents of the dance, while the shoulders and upper torso are kept straight. The slow dance of the noble

characters, however, emphasizes the delicate movements of the arms and hands. These are trained from the very beginning by bending the fingers backwards to create the unnaturally elegant finger gestures, already depicted in the early Khmer reliefs and later in Thai art. The arms are trained by pressing them between the knees until the softly curving shape is achieved (*liem*). The noble characters have not used masks in any style of dance drama since the end of the 19th century. They keep their faces, though, almost expressionless.

The monkey and demonic characters, on the other hand, have their own basic series of movements. They have six patterns of movements, of which the monkey's movements were later reduced to five. The technique of both role types is dominated by an extremely open leg position, the Indian-influenced characteristic of Southeast Asian martial dance. In fact, the demons' movement technique has its roots in ancient martial arts. Thus the demons' dance is aggressive, whereas the monkey's dance has its acrobatic and playful elements. Their movements imitate those of real monkeys and thus add to this complex movement system one more element, that of the very ancient animal dances.

Thailand Folk Dance

Traditional folk dances are collectively known in Thailand as *rabam phun muang*. They have their roots both in the indigenous tribal cultures and various colonial influences from Burma and Indonesia. The dances are steeped in the traditions of Asian folk dance and renowned for their graceful choreography.

Gray Miller wrote on [LoveToKnow .com](http://LoveToKnow.com): "Thailand "is divided into four major sections, and each has its own set of folk dances commemorating religious festivals, seasonal activities, or re-telling favorite stories from the Ramayana and other folk tales. According to the Arts section of Thailand.com, the northern dances have movements that emphasize the grace and flow of the dancers, while the southern and northeastern dances tend to have more active and even humorous aspects in their movement. Central Thailand folk dance choreography reflects the agrarian lifestyles of the people. These are generalizations, though, and every region has a wide variety of dance styles. [Source: Gray Miller, [LoveToKnow .com](http://LoveToKnow.com)]"

"Many of the dances tell stories from various religious traditions such as the Ramayana, or simply reenact exciting folk tales. For example, in the South the *Ram taeng Kae* dance portrays a large crocodile (made from the trunk of a banyan tree with candles flickering along its back) which an agile dancer with a harpoon is hunting . In the North there is a sword dance that involves balancing blades on various parts of the dancer's body while fighting off enemies with the sheath. Like any folk art, Thai dance is constantly

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changing and evolving as new influences are brought into the culture. Fawn Thai is the most well-known set of traditional folk dances, but there are other kinds that are just as much a part of the heritage of Thailand. [Ibid]

Folk dance forms include dance theatre forms like Likay, numerous regional dances (Ram), the ritual dance Ram Muay, and homage to the teacher, Wai Khru. Both Ram Muay and Wai Khru take place before all traditional Muay Thai matches. The Wai is also an annual ceremony performed by Thai classical dance groups to honor their artistic ancestors.

Forms of Thai Folk Dance

Gray Miller wrote on LoveToKnow .com: “Likay is a form of dance that has its roots in the Muslim religion. The form includes many comedic and cartoon-like elements, with the dancers hamming it up as they perform original stories as well as traditional favorites. Likay performances are most often seen at village festivals for the entertainment of all ages. Unlike many of the Fawn Thai dances, the costumes can be either traditional or contemporary or even a mixture of the two. [Source: Gray Miller, LoveToKnow .com]

Ram Muay is the ritualized dance that takes place before Southeast Asian kickboxing matches such as Muay Thai. At the beginning of a match the fighter performs a ram muay which is an exhibition of his prowess, skill, and grace. The moves range from very simple and slow to highly complex choreography that is almost too fast to follow, and often include clues and tributes to their past teachers or training styles. These dances (also known as wai khru) are usually performed on each side of the ring before each match. Also See Muay Thai (Kick Boxing) Under Sports. [Ibid]

Wai Khru is a ritualized form of dance meant to pay respect to, or homage to the khru or teacher. It is performed annually by Thai classical dance institutions as well as before Muay Thai matches. Other regional folk dance styles in Thailand include Pleng Cha-Pleng Reo; Mae Bot Lek; Rabam Chiangsaen; Tawai praporn; Rabam Tawarawadee; Baisri sukwan; Manora Buchayan; Uayporn Oonwan; Chuichai Bhram; Chuichai Benyakai; Sinuan Worachet; Chuichai Wantong; Sinuan Arnu; Rabam Loburi; Klidda Phinihan; Rabam Srichaisinghn; Rabam Sriwichai; Keb Baicha; Rabam Sukhothai; Rabam Dowwadueng; Nora Dance; Bugna Lampai; Choom-num Pao Thai; Kinnaree Ron; Sad Chatrri; Soeng Praewa; Krailassamrerng; Ten Kam Ram Keow; Soeng Sawing and Ramwong . [Source: Wikipedia]

Thai dance is taught by both professional teachers in large classical schools and at various cultural centers in smaller cities and villages. While there have been many changes due to global influences, there are still many places to see the traditional folk



dances performed by touring companies or even simply via YouTube clips. With centuries of dance tradition to draw from, the folk dances of Thailand are a treasure for both dancers and audience members to enjoy.

Fawn

Fawn Thai is another form of “folk-dance” accompanied by folk music of the region. The first Fawn originated from the northern region of Thailand, it was designed and taught by Chao Dararasami of Chiang Mai. Since then, a variety of “Fawn” came into practice, according to the music and style of each province, such as the Fawn-Lep fingernail dance from Chiang Mai, Fawn-Ngiew from Chiang Rai with the influence of Burmese music and costume. [Source: Wikipedia]

While they are sometimes performed alongside classical dances, the Fawn Thai are a set of folk dances performed by female dancers that have become famous throughout the world. There are five basic styles: 1) Fawn Leb (Fingernails Dance); 2) Fawn Tian (Candle Dance); 3) Fawn Marn Gumm Ber (Butterfly Dance); 4) Fawn Ngiew (Scarf Dance); 5) Fawn Marn Mong Kol (Happy Dance).

Each of these dances has its own particular musical accompaniment by traditional Thai instruments and singers, usually five to seven musicians accompanying four to six dancers. The costumes are traditional, simply-cut sarongs and shoulder-cloths with some minor variation in color depending on the region the dancer comes from. These dances

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also often have props (like the fans in Japanese and Korean fan dance) such as long brass fingernail extensions for the Fawn Leb or lit candles for the Fawn Tian.



Regional Dances of Central Thailand

Sri-Nuan is a typical dance of Central Thailand. Its great popularity is due to the beautiful choreography and the sweetness of the music that accompanies it. The lyrics and music evoke the sweet nature of Thai girls. The dance is also an expression of the yearning of a young man won by such great charm. [Source: Wikipedia]

Teut-Teung (Drum Dance) The teut-teung drum, a typical instrument used in Thai folk music, is played throughout the country to accompany the parades held at traditional festivals. It is said that the modern style of the Teut-Teung dance was created by some music teachers.

Farmers Dance (Rice Growers Dance) This is a modern dance created by the Thai Ministry of Culture. The dancers wear the rice growers traditional costume and the dance itself enacts the daily activities of these workers who are the backbone of the nation. The ballet opens with the farmers as they come to plough and sow the fields. When they are sure that the rice is growing well, they gather together to pray to Mae Po Sop, the goddess who protects rice-growing. Lastly, the harvest is celebrated with songs and dancing.

Combat with Short and Long Sticks, and with Swords These dances are inspired

by types of combat that are typical of Thailand, in which either sticks or swords are used. The skilful use of the short stick depends on the agility of the fighter, who must attack and always remain close to his opponent, while the combatant who takes up the long stick must maintain a certain distance from his rival to use his weapon effectively. The art of sword fighting has been practiced in Thailand since the beginning of time, and, traditionally, a ceremonial dance is performed prior to combat.



Regional Dances of Northeast Thailand

Serng Kratip Khoa is performed during traditional celebrations. Usually the word *serng* is added to the name of the domestic object used on stage by the dancers. In the case of the *Serng Kratip*, the dancers carry the typical rice baskets, known as *kratip*. Their movements imitate those of the women who bring food to the men working in the fields. The choreography is accompanied by music with a lively rhythm. The instruments used are a long drum, *charb* (cymbals), *grab* (a kind of castanet), *mong* (gong) and the *kahen* (like an old-fashioned syringe). [Source: Wikipedia]

Serng I-San is a folk dance is generally performed at traditional festivals. The choreography is entrusted to the dancers who wear brightly colored costumes, and expresses all the joy of the celebration. *Fon Phu Thai* dance is part of a propitiatory ceremony performed by the Phu Thai tribe, who live in the Northeast of the country.

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The music that accompanies it is played on typical instruments like the gong ching (a tribal drum), along with other drums and pipes. The gong ching plays a fundamental part because it sets the rhythm for the dance.

Serng Krapo (Coconut Dance) Krapo is the word for coconut in the Northeast dialect. The dance illustrates the activities of a group of nubile girls from the southern part of the region, known as I-San. The dancers hold two coconut shells, with which they execute complex choreographic movements, shaking them, tossing them or tapping them lightly. This dance is often accompanied by the sound of the pong lang, a kind of upright xylophone, made of strips of wood arranged according to the musical scale.

I-San Bantheong (The Happiness of I-San) This is a series of folk dances usually performed on festive occasions. The swift, harmonious movements are accompanied by folk songs associated with the Northeast region.



Regional Dances of Northern Thailand

Fon Sao Mai (Silk Weaving Dance) Fon is a type of dance in northern and northeastern Thailand. It is performed in groups and has very slow, graceful, and almost meditative movements. Fon Sao Mai depicts a traditional profession of northern Thai women in silk weaving. The dance imitates different processes of silk-weaving. For generations,

silk production is one of the top home industries in northern and northeastern Thailand and the neighboring country, Laos. [Source: Wikipedia]

Dance of the Nantha-Peri and Pu-Cha Drums: The nantha-peri is a drum characteristic of the northern region of Thailand, which is used for two purposes: to spur on warriors prior to battle and to pay homage to the Buddha in religious ceremonies. The pu-che , on the other hand, is a type of drum used by the tribes that live in the north: the Tay Yai, the Tai Lue and the Tay yan. It is used to accompany various dances including the sword dance, and the kai lai and king ka lai dances.

Sword Dance is inspired by an ancient martial art that requires tremendous courage and strength, and excellent reflexes. The dancers balance a number of swords on different parts of their bodies while fighting off their rival with a sword sheath. In the Ka-Lai Dance beginners learn to execute graceful and balanced movements through the choreography of this dance. The King-Ka-La Dance features hand movements and steps of the female dancers, who wear spectacular fan-shaped costumes, evoke the movements of a bird. The music that accompanies the The Sounds of the Mountains dance is played on wind instruments characteristic of three tribes in the North of Thailand: the pi hom (a gourd pipe) of the Tai Lue, the pi joom of the Tay Yuan and the kan nam tao (a gourd flute) of the Li Saw.

The Candle Dance, typical of the Thai Kheun tribe, is performed in honor of the Buddha. The female dancers pay homage to the divinities that protect the eight cardinal points of the Earth, asking them to pass through the candlelight in homage to the Buddha. Choeng Tua Auk-son Dance, performed in the Buddha's honor, is characterized by a complex choreography inspired by the calligraphy of the ancient alphabets of the northern regions and by the movements used in martial arts. The striking choreography of the Khan Dok Dance of blessing, it is said, expresses the calm, serene temperament of the northern peoples.

The Sounds of Lanna, the Ancient Kingdom of the North This music is played on two instruments typical of this region. The phin-phia is a stringed instrument whose body is made from a coconut shell. When he plays it, the musician rests the shell on his bare chest, then moves it or presses it to achieve the desired tonality. In the past, the phin-phia was the instrument used by youths to court the maidens of their village. Few musicians still play it. The sueng is a stringed instrument, made of teak or hard wood. It is played by plucking the two metal or brass strings with a horn plectrum.



Regional Dances of Southern Thailand

The Nora is a traditional dance of Southern Thailand (in South Thai language called the “Chatri”), whose origins lie in various legends of which there are different versions. The choreography of the Nora dance varies from region to region, but is generally composed of 12 positions and 17 movements. Nora Tua Oon is a very refined version of the Nora requires great interpretive skills and experience. To learn this Nora it must be studied from a very young age, so that the body can achieve the flexibility necessary to execute the complicated movements. The female dancers, in fact, follow a demanding exercise regime and a strict discipline. [Source: Wikipedia]

Ram taeng Kae is another elaborate Nora dance that requires great interpretative gifts. On the stage the protagonist launches a harpoon at the crocodile, whose back, lit by candles, is made from the trunk of a banyan tree. The female dancer moves round the writhing crocodile, poised to pierce its head at the right moment. The Ram Nora Son Ram is a basic posture, which is executed by concentrating on hand arm and shoulder movements, and on the equilibrium and movement of various parts of the body, and is accompanied by rather long lyrics.

Ram Ko Soet is an advanced level of the Nora dance is usually performed during

a competition between two groups of dancers. To intimidate the rival group, a male dancer strikes an effigy. In the version known as Yleb Louk Manao, the female protagonist stamps on three lemons symbolizing the hearts of the rivals. The dance is performed as a sign of victory. In the next dance the female protagonist asks the pran, the comical hunter, to give her a headdress as a symbol of her victory. This is a ceremonial ritual carried out to dishonor rivals and to encourage the members of the group, and is characterized by a certain sacredness, as can be seen from the style of the dance. Ram Nora Bot Pratom uses another basic posture, in which hand, arm and shoulder movements are synchronized with those of the head.

Ram Nora Klong Hong is an advanced level of Nora is performed only on important occasions. The female protagonist plays the role of Hong or Kinnaree - a legendary creature who is half woman and half bird. According to a celebrated Nora teacher, this episode is partly based on the legend of Prasuton-Manora. The seven Kinnaree are playing in the lake in the middle of a wood. Struck by their beauty and lightheartedness, Pran Boon, the hunter, chases the maidens in an attempt to catch the youngest. The lively harmonious movements perfectly evoke Pran Boon's pursuit of the Kinnaree as she tries to escape.

Ram Nora Tam Bot features hand movements evoke the beautiful scenery of Songkhla Province in South Thailand. The verses of the song are accompanied by a very lively rhythm. Ram Ooak Pran In the company that performs a Nora, the pran or hunter plays the part of the fool. He usually wears a hunter's mask or headdress. His movements are often amusing, and designed to make the audience laugh. Each position is in harmony with the dynamic rhythm of the music.

Text Sources: Jukka O. Miettinen, Asian Traditional Theater and Dance, Theatre Academy Helsinki, New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Times of London, Lonely Planet Guides, Library of Congress, Tourist Authority of Thailand, Thailand Foreign Office, The Government Public Relations Department, CIA World Factbook, Compton's Encyclopedia, The Guardian, National Geographic, Smithsonian magazine, The New Yorker, Time, Newsweek, Reuters, AP, AFP, Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic Monthly, The Economist, Global Viewpoint (Christian Science Monitor), Foreign Policy, Wikipedia, BBC, CNN, NBC News, Fox News and various books and other publications.

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Thai Classical Dance : Some Basic Terminology



The hands and the arms

1. TUNG MU

Description: Face the palm toward the floor. Then, flex the hand upward at the wrist; the palm faces away from the body. The hand should be as perpendicular to the wrist as possible. The thumb points diagonally upward and perpendicularly to the palm; the other four fingers stay close together, bending and stretching as far backward as possible.

2. WONG

WONG consists of the TUNG MU position of the hand, and the curvature of the arm.

Description: Open the arm almost the whole way toward the side. The palm faces the floor. Lift the forearm slightly upward and slightly to the front to form a curve with the upper arm. The hand forms the TUNG MU position. The final pose of the whole procedure is called WONG.

The WONG of a male character is slightly more open to the side than of a female character.

There are four types of WONG. Each type is formed by the same technique, but using different positions.



2.1 WONG BON

WONG BON is the upper WONG.

Description: Begin by forming a WONG. The position for the WONG BON of a male character is slightly higher than that of female character, with the fingertips at the same level as the temple. For a female character, the fingertips are at the same as the lower end of the eyebrow.



2.2 WONG KLANG

WONG KLANG is the middle WONG.

Description: Start out by forming a WONG. For WONG-KLANG, the fingertips are at the same level as the shoulder, and the elbow at about the same level as the midriff.



2.3 WONG LANG

WONG LANG literally means the lower WONG but the position is to the front of the waist.

Description: The hand forms TUNG MU to the front of the waist; thus, the arm forms a curve downward and to the side of the body.



2.4 WONG NA

WONG NA means the WONG to the front of the body.

Description: Form a WONG to the front of the body with the fingertips at the same level as the lips. For a female character, the fingertips directly face the corner of the lips. The WONG NA for a male character is slightly more open with the fingertips out front of the cheek.

3. CHIP

Description: CHIP is formed through the following process. Close the tip of the thumb to the joint between the tip and the middle section of the index finger. The other three fingers are open, bending and stretching as far backward as possible. The palm flexes as far inward the wrist as possible.



3.1 CHIP NGAI

CHIP NGAI can be described as the upward CHIP.

Description: The hand forms a CHIP. But CHIP NGAI is designated by the position of the elbow facing the floor, and the three spreading fingers, especially the middle finger, in an upward position.



3.2 CHIP KHWAM

CHIP KHWAM is the downward CHIP.

Description: CHIP KHWAM can be formed by turning CHIP NGAI upside-down.



3.3 CHIP LANG

CHIP LANG is the CHIP NGAI which is positioned to the back of the body.

Description: Lift the arm backward, with the palm facing upward. Then, form CHIP NGAI.



4. SAI KHAEN

Description: The SAI KHAEN movement for one arm can be broken down into two parts.

The first part starts out with the arm stretching to the side and to the shoulder level., the hand forms TUNFG MU. Lower the arm toward the side of the body. When the arm is in the downward position, change TUNG MU to NGAI MU.

The second part is the reverse of the first part. Move the arm upward. When the arm reaches its original position at the shoulder level, change NGAI MU to TUNG MU.

During the whole exercise, the arm should remain stretched. Repeat the action alternatively several times.

To perform SAI KHAEN with both arms, one of the arms starts moving from the first part to the second part as describe above, whereas the other starts out from the second part and ends with the first part. Thus, both arms move in the opposite direction. Repeat the movement several times.



Ramwong Dance

Ramwong is a Thai folk dance which was evolved from Ramthone, a popular seasonal entertainment of a certain region. Ram means dance and Thone is a small drum. Ramthone can be explained as dancing to the accompaniment of the drum beats. Also, there are other percussive instruments to play in the ensemble: they are “Ching,” a pair of tiny cymbals, and “Krub,” which are wooden castanets.

As the Ramthone grew in popularity and spread to many provinces, varieties of songs were ad-libbed. The lyrical singing implied the message of Ramwong or Ramthone and become a favorite entertainment for all walks of life during the second world war, as it was the only amusement they could afford in the hard times. They gathered spontaneously in the vacant spaces under the shimmering light of the lamp which was placed in the middle of the arena. They played music, selected their pairs, and danced in circles around the lamp. The dance gestures were a version of improvisation. The ability to perform the dance depended on keeping their feet and limbs moving to synchronize with the regulated tempo. They sometimes symbolized the lyrical text.

Ramwong has been popular among Thais and foreigners since 1941. There are about ten types of Ramwong created in the Fine Arts Department

1. Ngam Saeng Deuan
2. Shoa Thai
3. Rum Si Ma Rum
4. Kuen Duean Ngay
5. Duang Chan Wan Pen
6. Dok Mai Kong Chad
7. Ying Thai Jai Ngam
8. Duang Chan Kwan Fa
9. Yod Chai Jai Harn
10. Boo Cha Nak Rob

เนื้อเพลงรำวงมาตรฐาน Ram wong Song



สอดสร้อยมาลา
Sod Soi Ma La

เพลง งามแสงเดือน

งามแสงเดือนมาเยือนส่องหล้า
งามใบหน้าเมื่ออยู่วงรำ
(ซ้ำ 2 เที่ยว)
เราเล่นเพื่อสนุก
เปลื้องทุกข์วายระกำ
ขอให้เล่นฟ้อนรำ
เพื่อสามัคคีเอย

NGAM SAENG DEUAN

Ngam Saeng Deuan Ma Yeuan Song Lar
Ngam Bai Nar Mua You Wong Rum
(2 times)
Rao Len Kan Pur Sanook
Pluang Took Wai Ra Kum
Kor Hai Len Fon Rum
Pur Sa Mak Kee Oei



ชกแป้งผัดหน้า
Chak Pang Pad Nar

เพลง ชาวไทย

ชาวไทยเจ้าเอ๋ย
ขออย่าละเลยในการทำหน้าที่
การที่เราได้เล่นสนุก
เปลื้องทุกข์สบายอย่างนี้
เพราะชาติเราได้เสรี
มีเอกราชสมบูรณ์
เราจึงควรช่วยชูชาติ
ให้แก่งกาจเจ็ดจ้าวรูด
เพื่อความสุขเพิ่มพูน
ของชาวไทยเราเอ๋ย

SHOA THAI

Shoa Thai Chao Oei
Kor Yaa La Loei Nai Karn Tam Na Ti
Karn Ti Rao Dai Len Sanook
Pluang Took Sa Bai Yang Nee
Proa Chat Rao Dai Se Ri
Mee Ek Ka Rad Som Boon
Rao Jung Kuan Chuay Shoo Chat
Hai Keng Kat Jerd Jam Roon
Pur Kwam Sook Perm Poon
Kong Chao Thai Rao Oei



รำสาย
Rum Sai

เพลง รำมาซิมารำ

รำมาซิมารำ

เรingersบ้ำกัันให้้สนุก

ยามงานเราทำงานจริง ๆ

ไม่ละไม่ทิ้งจะเกิดเชื้อขุก

ถึงยามว่างเราจึงรำเล่น

ตามเชิงเช่นเพื่อให้สร้างทุกซ์

ตามเยี่ยงอย่างตามยุค

เล่นสนุกอย่างวัฒนธรรม

เล่นอะไรให้มีระเบียบ

ให้งามให้เรียบร้อยจึงจะคมขำ

มาซิมาเจ้าเอ๋ยมาฟ้อนรำ

มาเล่นระบำของไทยเราเอย

RUM MA SI MA RUM

Rum Ma Si Ma Rum

Reng Ra Bum Kan Hai Sanook

Yam Ngan Roa Tam Ngam Jing Jing

Mai La Mai Ting Ja Kerd Ken Kuk

Tung Yam Wang Roa Jung Rum Len

Tam Cheng Chen Pur Hai Sang Tuk

Tam Yiang Yang Tam Yook

Len Sanook Yang Watanatham

Len Arai Hai Mee Ra Biab

Hai Ngam Hai Riab Jung Ja Kom Kham

Ma Si Ma Chao Oei Ma Fon Rum

Ma Len Ra Bum Khong Thai Roa Ori

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