

## **Isan Folk Dance: The Influenced Thai Classical Dance Changes in Northeast Higher Education Institutions**

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**Abstract:** This research was aimed to study the history, current conditions and the changes of Isan dance posture under the influence of Thai classical dance in Northeast higher education institutions. The data was collected from textbooks, research papers and field study with a survey participated observation structured interview and group discussion and presented the results by descriptive analysis, illustrations and tables. According to research study, it was found that the higher education institutions in the Northeastern region is conducted Isan folk dance teaching and learning about 12 institutions, namely Khon Kaen University, Mahasarakham University, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, Udon Thani Rajabhat University, Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University, Maha Sarakham Rajabhat University, Buriram Rajabhat University, Loei Rajabhat University, Surin Rajabhat University, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Roi Et College of Dramatic Arts, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts and Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Nakhon Ratchasima College of Dramatic Arts. Each institution conducts teaching under the qualifications framework for higher education which separated to 2 courses: Bachelor of Fine and Applied Arts Program (Performing arts) and Bachelor of Education Program (Thai classical dance) emphasized on conservation and extend a creative for development as resulted in Isan folk dance was categorized in Thailand Northeastern University into 2 categories: traditional dance means the inherited dance from ancient which reflect local identity. The dance postures are simple, free movement with a low bent appearance and wide range without sparing. Focus on fun and harmony i.e., Fon Phuthai, Fon Klong Tum, Seng Bung Fai and so on. The traditional dance was contained in the curriculum as it was gathered from teachers, instructor or local wisdom, Isan contemporary dance means dance which teachers or students created occasionally according to be work of art or thesis performing for curriculum assessment. Isan folk dance in higher education institutions in the Northeastern region got influenced from Thai classical dance as the study result of Fon Pook Xiao of Khon Kaen University, Fon Tang Wai of Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University and Fon Manora of Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Roi Et College of Dramatic Arts which shows the influence of Thai classical dance with characteristic body movements systematically; head, torso, hands, feet corresponded with each other. Upstanding posture, neck-nodding and open tip-toe posture, dance posture go along with lyric as its complexity, elaborately and several hundred ports of entry as well as the presence dance moves to gathered. Furthermore, it was found that the Isan folk dance has corresponded with 22 Thai classical dance postures, namely, Nang Klom Tua, Sodsoi Mala, Chuichai Khao Wang, Phamorn Khao, Thep Phanom, Jeep Song Lang, Phala Pianglai, Naga Muanhang, Jab Pranang, Mangkon Laennam, Krabi Si Tha, Krata Reaw, Thang Wong Klang, Chang Pang Padna, Chan Songkod, Pra Rod Yonsal, Bang Suriya, Khad Jang Nang, Ram Sad Chatree, Ram Yua, Phamorn Khao, Ngoo Kwang Khon. The changes are caused from the curriculum structure and the teaching pattern which strict in national culture to create basic skills by practicing with slow song, fast song, body posture and Ram Mae Bot (Masterdance). Isan folk dance in the Northeast higher education institutions are a consequence of deficiency for specific curriculum in the region, therefore, it is necessary to hold Thai classical dance to re-structure to Isan folk dance style then organizing the Isan folk dance to be delicate, beautiful and flexible resulted in patterns, principles, styles toward Isan folk dance for appropriate and current trend. Thus, we can confirm that the pattern of Thai classical dance is a decent customs to be an archetype, however, we should concern in cultural to prevent changes that may cause to cultural assimilation.

**Key words:** Isan folk dance, Isan dance in higher education institutions, Thai classical dance influences, Thai classical, descriptive analysis, curriculum assessment

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## INTRODUCTION

**Background and significance of the study:** Humans create a culture to respond to their psychological needs which are considered to be relaxing and entertaining. The expression of feelings is the main function of the arts, dance and folk tales. Anthropologists named these behaviors as “Behavioral expression” (Santibombat, 1997) the behavior expression has along with human society which reflected livelihood according to the provisions of the existing culture in society (Kosinannon, 1992) in any human society including race, language or gender, although, there are differences but one thing that every nation, every language must have is their identity, namely art which has been passed down from ancestors to the present that other cannot seize. And it’s also a distinct national identity that must be cherished and preserved (Thepvong, 1998).

Art and culture are the uniqueness of each nation which can reflect their stories that occur in society. It also indicates how people survive under in a constantly changing society resulted in a way of life of people who amalgamated with art and culture inseparable. Art and culture are valuable and beneficial toward nationalities in various aspects. The first important thing is provided a lessening and entertaining device which has seemed in society in each nation for a long time. Particularly in Thai society, it appeared that entertainment culture plays a significant role from the past to the present and has gained popularity from people of all stages according to in the past, it lacks technology and the device to entertain people in society is inevitable. Folk wisdom which has been passed down from ancestors with literature, materials art, art dance, handicraft has merged into a performance art or dance to entertain audiences along with cultivating morality unconsciously Thai performing arts can be divided into many types which called different names such as Khon, Lakorn, dance, etc. These performances are also subdivided to specific details of each genre and changed over time.

Traditional dance is an important performing art and has been essential to people’s livelihood, since in olden periods in any ethnics have their own traditional dance custom which considered as ethnic identity and to distinct of differences depending on various factors including Thailand which traditional dance is branch of national art to define Thai nation with attractive and delicate from its characteristics, therefore, it has created a favor and impression for visitor who has seen. Traditional dance is a part of art can infer to drama or classical dance (Royal Institute of Thailand, 2003) which in this meaning word have other synonyms such as Rabam, Ram, Fon, Seng, Den, etc. The postures in Isan folk dance can be expressed the true identity of the Northeast identity. And also contain implicit wisdom, art and culture in various

aspects such as literature, music, beliefs, rituals, traditions, etc. It can be concluded that Isan folk dance has a relationship and plays an significant role in Isan people livelihood, however, it cannot just conclude how it originated not only from assumption Vongprasert (1989) assumes that the dance might cause from God and Ghosts belief resulted in ritual offerings which originated to sacrifice chant and turn into a ritual song, after that compose with a gesture to be traditional dance later. Besides, Wongthet (1989) also describes characteristics of dance in the past by studying historical records such as paintings at Pha Khao Chan Ngam, Sikhiu district, Nakhon Ratchasima province and patterns on the metal drum in metal age which discovered in Dong Son in Vietnam. It was stated that the dance originated from the belief of the sacred frog to cause dance posture i.e., spread arms, widen legs and knees drop to imitate sacred frog position. This dance is a basic feature of human movement and developed into a traditional dance posture until the present.

The Isan folk dance has developed continuously, it has changed or adapted to appropriate lifestyle or social value. At present, the art of Isan dance is not only in specific villagers but also interesting of several sectors, therefore, it was organized as a course of study in undergraduate, master and doctoral degrees as Juthavijit (1996) who study on Isan folk dance and dance and identify Isan folk dance according to their source as follows: Isan folk dance in ritual, Isan folk dance in Northeastern-style singer, Isan folk dance in a parade and Isan folk dance in an educational institution. When considered by each in-depth we will see Isan folk dance in ritual, Isan folk dance in Northeastern-style singer and Isan folk dance in the parade is under control or operated by villagers. But Isan folk dance in education institution under control and operated by institutions, organizations which have a systematic and structured system. This cause is a direct effect Isan folk dance in the institute which possibly leads to cultural assimilation.

The changes of Isan folk dance in the Northeast higher education institutions were caused a various issue which not a new issue but gradually, accumulated for a long period due to ignorance and overlook an important detail. The problem is difficult to solve in a short period but if it was put intention and attention to every detail of traditional culture, it will reduce the Isan folk dance in higher education institutions in the Northeastern from being influenced by Thai classical dance consequently and may ultimately separate at the end of the problem solution. From mentioned in history and significant above, the study shows the importance of the Isan folk dance and changes which occur consistency and probably lead to a shortage of cultural identity, thus the study of “Isan folk dance: the influenced Thai classical dance changes in Northeast higher education institutions” is

aimed to study of history, modern state and dance posture changes under the influence of Thai classical dance. In addition, the researcher hopes that this study will be beneficial for academic, cultural education, informational education in regional, national and international stages.

#### **Research objectives:**

- To study history and present stage of Isan folk dance in higher education institutions in the Northeastern region
- To study changes of the Isan folk dance under the influence of Thai classical dance in higher education institutions in the Northeastern region

#### **Terminology:**

- Isan folk dance means the art of moving the various parts of the body into a specific posture of the Isan people. The dance was reflected in an identity local dance culture
- Change means different dance posture from previous dance with this change can be implied in both positive and negative ways
- Influence of Thai classical dance means factors which affect the change of Isan folk dance to represent Thai classical dance or capital-style dance
- Higher education institutions in Northeastern refer to universities or specific educational institutions which provide courses in teaching Isan folk dance or traditional dance in Northeastern

**Scope of research:** The study was aimed to study the present stage and the change of posture dance in Northeastern under Thai classical influence in higher education institution which provides courses in teaching Isan folk dance or traditional dance.

**Research benefits:** Knowledgeable the history, present stage and dance posture changes in Northeastern under influence of Thai classical dance in higher education institution in Northeastern.

Knowledgeable solutions guideline of problems caused by dance posture changes under influence of Thai classical dance in higher education institution in Northeastern and future development of Isan folk dance.

Knowledgeable concept to adapt for the cultural survival of Isan folk dance with integrated traditional and modern style to be contemporary with appropriate proportion and equivalent resulted in Isan folk dance has popular in now a days by maintaining traditional identity and presented in a modern approach, follow custom, tradition and culture for a proper show in public and international.

To preserve, succeed and publicize Isan local folk culture from study and record systematically with the research methodology, it also beneficial for academic, cultural education, informational education in regional, national and international stages.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Population and sampling:** The population study, the researcher chose to study directly in related Isan folk dance group which uses specific selection methods to provide information and can be divided into 3 groups as follows:

Key informants are national artists, local wisdom, Isan folk dance specialist and Thai classical dance specialist experienced at least 10 years and released or publish work consistency in academic or cultural arts.

Casual informants are Isan folk dance or Thai classical dance instructor who experienced in this filed continuously for at least 10 years.

General informants are administrators and head of the department or curriculum chairperson who organizes for the teaching of Isan folk dance or Thai classical dance in higher education institution which is selected as a sample in the Northeastern (Fig. 1).

**Data collection tools:** A survey is used to explore general information from groups to acknowledge higher education institutions which have curriculum and teaching in Isan folk dance. Participant observation is used to gather information by participating in the process of transferring Isan folk dance to achieve information in higher education institutions in the Northeastern by direct experience to the researcher.

The structured interview used to interview casual and general informants to indistinct and comprehensive data of all issues which beneficial analysis and synthesis. The discussion group is brainstorming from informant by invited 14 specialists of Isan folk dance on February 19, 2014 at Buddha Silpa Building, Office of Culture Center, Khon Kaen University.

**Data collection:** Document data collection in from documents, books, texts, journals, articles and related research by searching from various sources in both public and private sector. Field data collection is a selected area study by choosing to study higher education institution in Northeastern which has a curriculum and the teaching of Isan folk dance or Thai classical dance of 12 institutions. Case study selection to use a specific selection methods by dividing the 12 higher education institutions with courses and teaching in the Northeast or dance arts into 3 groups and choose an institution which first establishment of each group to be a case study then conducted an interview with participants to identify uniqueness in Isan



Fig. 1: Research conceptual framework

folk dance in each institution for analysis changes of the Isan folk dance under the influence of Thai classical dance in higher education institutions according to research objectives.

**Scrutinizing and analysis of data:** Categorize all data from data collection from documents and the field study to facilitate data analysis and answer research objectives. Review the integrity of data collection.

Investigate data accuracy to find the correctness and reliability of information by returning to the informant to read and ask information as confirmation to match with reality accompany with using triangulation methodological to examine data reliability. Data analysis, the researchers have divided data collection into 2 parts:

**Document data analysis:** Means data investigate the validity conceptual theory which considered from many documents and multiple sources to examine accuracy and reliability.

**Field data analysis:** Means data analysis from all types of tools in collecting data to create a conclusion by using 3 types of analysis: inductive analysis; summary interpretation from explicit data or visible phenomenon, data analysis by classification which uses theory as data classification and non-theoretical analysis, however, it has to depend on data appropriateness and comparative data analysis by comparing to the sequence of events or phenomena.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Higher education institution in Northeastern which conduct courses and teaching Isan folk dance is the result of the National Economic and Social Development Plan which is the main policy used to develop Thailand to meet appropriate needs in each period. In the past, education was an important issue which must be developed in parallel with the art and culture of Thai to strengthen nationalism. Therefore, education development was



Fig. 2: Comparing images of Fon Pook Xiao and Ram Mae Bot (Master dance)

distributed throughout the region, resulting in higher education institutions in different regions at similar times. The study folk dancing in the Northeastern region began from Thai classical dance which is the basis of dance education, latter each institution has established a curriculum which suited with local dance culture. Currently, Isan folk dance was taught in 12 institutions which divided into 3 groups according to the type of institution as follows: State University; Khon Kaen University and Mahasarakham University. Rajabhat University; Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, UdonThaniRajabhat University, Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat University, Maha Sarakham Rajabhat University, Buriram Rajabhat University, Loei Rajabhat University, Surin Rajabhat University, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute; Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Roi Et College of Dramatic Arts, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts and Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Nakhon Ratchasima College of Dramatic Arts.

Each institution teaching under Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (TQF: HEd) was categorized into two curricula; Fine and Applied Arts Program (Performing Arts) and Education Program (Thai Classical Dance) which both curriculum emphasis on conservation to inherit and further development (Fig. 2).

Isan folk dance in higher education institutions in the Northeastern region have similar characteristics and can be divided into 2 types as follows: traditional dance means the inherited dance from ancient which reflect local identity. The dance postures are simple, free movement with a low bent appearance and wide range without sparing and focus on fun and harmony i.e., Fon Phuthai Kalasin, Fon Phuthai Renu Nakhon, Fon Phuthai Sakon Nakhon, Fon Klong Yao, Fon Klong Tum, ReumAnre, Ruem Kantruem and so on. The traditional dance was used as patterns in the curriculum as it was taught by teachers, instructor or local wisdom, creative Isan dance (Performing Arts Thesis) means new created Isan dance to be a part of evaluation before graduation in a bachelor's degree. The creation of creative Isan dance

is integrated knowledge from education to create a new show based on student interest and aptitude such as Fon Pook Xiao, FonLeumlai, Fon Ae Dokpeng, Fon Ae Fai, Fon Lela Nakarach, Fon Lela Patone, Fon Wanta Matakoo, etc.

Isan folk dance in higher education institutions in Northeastern under the influence of Thai classical dances, due to the curriculum and teaching patterns that are based on ancient traditions as national cultures. Requiring basic skills training by practicing posture, slow music, fast music, posture, (Ram Mae Bot) master dance, then compose Isan dance in the Northeastern higher education institutions have a pattern to create non-strict beauty. From 3 persuasive cases study, namely, Fon Pook Xiao of Khon Kaen University, Fon Tang Wai of Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University and Fon Manora Lennam of Bunditpatanasilpa Institute and Roi Et College of Dramatic Arts, the study result indicated that Thai classical dance has significant influence to Isan folk dance posture resulted in changes which are dance with Isan folk dance style in systematic orderly, head, body, hands, correspond with upstanding posture, neck-nodding and open tip-toe posture, dance posture go along with lyric as Ram Mae Bot (Master dance) with decorative and complex which is a combination of various postures.

In addition, there are 22 dance postures which correspond with Thai classical dance i.e., Nang Klom Tua, Sodsoi Mala, ChuichaiKhao Wang, Phamorn Khao, Thep Phanom, Jeep Song Lang, Phala Pianglai, Naga Muanhang, Jab Pranang, Mangkon Laennam, Krabi Si Tha, Krata Reaw, Thang Wong Klang, Chang Pang Padna, Chan Songkod, Pra Rod Yonsal, Bang Suriya, Khad Jang Nang, Ram Sad Chatree, Ram Yua, Phamorn Khao, Ngoo Kwang Khon. Furthermore, it was found that dressing and makeup are more delicate and favor to ornate hair with flower.

## CONCLUSION

Higher Education Institution in Northeastern which conduct courses and teaching Isan folk dance is the result

of the National Economic and Social Development Plan which is emphasis on multi-skill, develop education to respond demand of market to facilitate benefit in various aspects, especially in art and culture which causes Silapakorn school for the teaching music and classical dance in central of Thailand. Later distributed to other regions where is the establishment of Isan folk education which categorize into 4 groups according to sources at the present, namely, Isan folk dance in ritual, Isan folk dance in Northeastern-style singer, Isan folk dance in a parade and Isan folk dance in education institution (Juthavijit, 1996).

Isan folk dance in Northeast higher education institutions is to preserve local culture, since, originating with systematic study. It also is a further development of local art and culture to have a variety of pattern, modern response with tastes of people in society, turn to beauty pattern according to the aesthetics theories (Tangnamo, 1995) which is the science of beauty based on the satisfaction, emotions, perception affect creative Isan dance in various patterns which was a uniqueness in each institution.

Isan folk dance in Northeast higher education institutions reflect to change which has caused traditional teaching as it has to rely on Thai classical dance and transfer from teachers to students by creating attitude, cultivate concept and practice dance posture slow and fast song. Apart from teaching and learning process is the way to Isan folk dance changes when noticing form and composition together with Semiology theory to interpret or give definition of around things which is necessary to integrate with previous knowledge to interpret together with movement theory has described about areas of energy and movement and it can be shown that Thai classical dance create non-strictly custom, caused to Isan folk dance compose with a complex posture i.e., upstanding posture, neck-nodding, Tang Wong (Ready position), Ceep Meu (Close forefinger with thumb) and open tip-toe posture, dance posture go along with more attractive apparels. With this phenomenon when

considered with cultural diffusion theory which mentioned that “Culture has distributed when communication occurred which become to cultural exchanges with each other. The humans will select what is suitable for society to apply with their life” that shows, the customs of Thai classical dance is a good teaching to learners, therefore the change of the Isan folk dance under the influence of Thai classical dance in the higher education institutions in the Northeast is reflected to the social and cultural evolution which changed from backwardness to prosperity and complexity and should be monitored to prevent changes which may cause cultural assimilation.

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