

The Dance from Concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism

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Abstract

The objectives of this dissertation are to create dance pattern and to explore dance creation concept. This research has been regards as creative research and qualitative research approaches. Research context includes multidisciplinary studies from the Concepts of Buddhism, Philosophy, Dance, and Fine and Applied Arts. Research tools include standard criteria of artists, analysis from documents and textbooks, electronic media that are related to dance, and in-depth interviews with specialists. Data will be analyzed, synthesized, supported dance, and summarized respectively. Findings shown that pattern of dance can be divided into 8 elements which are (1) The Script created based on concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism (2) The Performers with competency in dance, emotional expression and message communication (3) The Choreography of postmodern dance concept (4) The Music design from instruments that create ambience of meditation (5) The Props and performance crafts design in minimalism concept that symbolize simple and cost-saving view which is easy to convey message; lotus and candle (6) The Performance area that ignores traditional stage in theatre and rather use open areas (7) The Lighting design that applies color theory in conveying story, feelings and events and (8) The Costumes design with minimalism concept that ignore gender but focus on unity. Dance creation concept focuses on 7 aspects which are (1) Philosophy of Buddhism (2) Simplicity based on postmodern dance (3) Creativity in dance (4) Symbols in dance (5) Theories of dance, music, and visual arts (6) Social reflection through dance and 7) Creative dance for children. Researcher has arranged dance exhibition to gain

public feedback. Audiences include 249 dance secondary-level students, undergraduates, specialists, dance artists, dance teachers in university and secondary school, and public. Findings from public criticism and questionnaires had shown that application of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism concept as a part of dance is unique and challenging for both exhibitors and audiences. This is the creative art that blends both oriental and western cultures and gain significant public acceptance. Audiences also perceived that this creative dance is the knowledge worth sharing to all Buddhists.

Keywords: Buddhism; Dance; Choreography; Postmodern dance

Introduction

Religion is one of philosophy knowledge that lasts for thousand years. This field is related to the proof of human's beliefs that influence daily lives in terms of faith, energy, superstition, or super-natural power that correspond to many phenomenon which cannot be proven by science. Religion is directly related to human and becomes the medium that enhance relationship of people in living peacefully and safely together.

Buddhism is one of many religions in the world and this religion is influenced by Indian cultures "which has been extensively penetrated to South East Asia, especially in terms of Buddhism and arts" (Vudhaditya, 2009: 18). Therefore, Thailand and Buddhism have been interdependent as depicted from cultural arts in Thailand, including performing arts, literature, and painting. It is widely known that Buddhism is the most respected religion among Thai people. "Buddhism is the word defined for religion that was originated by Siddhattha Gotama Buddha and shared in Jambul Dwipa region in the past which include India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and some parts of Afghanistan at the present time" (Phosan, 2008: 15). There are many religious lessons that people apply to guide their mind and support daily lives.

Buddhism describes the renowned truth of life, *Trilaksana* (three characteristics of existence) which refers to three aspects that determine conditions, including *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (stress and conflict), and *Anatta* (non-self). Concept of *Trilaksana* demonstrates the truth of realization toward nature of things as this perspective refers to the simple rule of everything in the world. "Common characteristic or *Trilaksana* is usual feature of everything" (Burawas, 2011: 195). Buddhists are familiar with the terms Arising, Existing, and Falling. This natural rule also covers both concrete and abstract things.

Buddhism has been shared in various approaches in which the common lesson includes Buddhism art, the expression of Buddhism in many aspects based on creativity of artists who apply philosophy, insight, and beliefs of human in art. Some masterpieces can be clearly understood but some are too complicated to understand within a short period of time.

Buddhism art is mostly in forms of painting, sculpture, architecture which are considered permanent art. Movable form of Buddhism art such as dance is uncommon. However, history shown that dance is related to religions of human.

Findings of research about dance in Thailand shown that most studies focus on its background, performance traditions, dance for private and public events, and dance concept. It is unlikely for researchers to study dance with other subjects based on multidisciplinary basis and the number of creative studies are insufficient. Access to research of dance is also limited because materials of this field are less than those of other study areas. In this study, researcher is strongly interested in applying knowledge of Buddhism, philosophy, dance, and fine and applied arts to contribute to societies and demonstrate symbol of Buddhism that represent the competency to understand every single thing in the world. In-depth understanding of these knowledge can be applied to many theories or concepts to create unique Buddhism art. Buddhism art can be created through study of dance composition and functions of body movement, as well as posture. Research findings can be utilized by analyzing various uniqueness of Buddhism art, implications and objectives of Buddhism art in each culture.

However, creation of dance in globalized world strongly requires in-depth knowledge and understanding of arts. Dance conveys messages through body movement and this field illustrates plenty of historical knowledge. Nevertheless, such background has not been studied with systematic analysis and synthesis process, and rationale. Wisdom of such area is not fully applied to create new knowledge that can be proven as reference. Therefore, this creative research has gathered knowledge to create dance based on Buddhism and exchange knowledge among various fields. This creation also conveys the concept of *Dhamma* as opinion-leading message to community and can be applied for further dance of Buddhism art, thus enhancing value of dance and sustaining its concept in Thai society.

Research Objectives

Researcher has identified objectives as follows;

- 1) To create model of dance based on concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism.
- 2) To study concept of dance from multidisciplinary studies.

Research Methodology

Research about “The Dance from Concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism” is the study that combines creative research and qualitative research together based on multidisciplinary study from Buddhism, philosophy, dance, and fine and applied arts. Research methodology is as follows;

1) Methodology – This research aims to create dance based on concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism based on these methodologies;

1.1) Study relevant Thai and international documents and researches.

1.2) Interview dance artists, teachers, specialists in Buddhism, philosophy, dance, and fine and applied arts.

1.3) Study creative dance that apply concept of Buddhism.

1.4) Study trend of Eastern and Western dance.

1.5) Apply information in 1.1-1.4 to create tools or criteria to conduct creative research.

1.6) Create test model of dance based on concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism.

1.7) Have specialist in dance evaluate the performance and provide suggestions for further improvement.

1.8) Arrange seminar or exhibition that demonstrates findings of creative research and opens for public criticism. Researcher also has to distribute questionnaires that include close-ended and open-ended questions, evaluation section, and report respectively.

2) Data collection tools

Data collection includes;

2.1) Data are derived from documents, textbooks, books,

interviews, and various researches regarding Buddhism, philosophy, semiology, and fine and applied arts.

2.2) Model of dance creation based on Buddhism, philosophy, dance, and fine and applied arts.

2.3) Audio visual equipment including computer, video, recorder.

3) Data collection methods

Researcher has gathered information based on research methodology.

4) Data analysis

Researcher follows these processes;

4.1) Analyze the contents by analyzing documents and observing respondents based on fieldwork process.

4.2) Create dance by considering creation process and factors of dance.

Results

By complying with research methodology to meet objectives of research, this dissertation can be divided into 2 key parts; first part is about pattern of dance creation and concept of dance. Key concepts are as follows;

1) Pattern of dance consisting of 8 components of performance include.

1.1) Script

Script of this performance is inspired by the concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism, demonstrating common characteristics of every single thing in the world. This concept is divided into 3 aspects which are *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (stress and conflict), and *Anatta* (non-self). The script illustrates story of Buddha, important days in Buddhism, and three-dimension art concept to elaborate the view of *Trilaksana*. Performance is divided into 4 acts which are *Act I: Overture* that presents the peaceful condition of meditation, *Act II: Anicca* that presents development of *Trilaksana* and 1-dimension art, *Act III: Dukkha* that

presents living state of *Trilaksana* and 2-dimension art, and *Act IV: Anatta* that presents inexistence of *Trilaksana* and 3-dimension art. Unity of dance script is the key factor for script writing.

1.2) Performers

Tryout method is used for casting performers who are highly competent in dance, disciplined, diligent, eager to learn, and possess interpersonal skill. Experience of applications in dance or performance is also the key criteria in casting. Six performers which are 3 males and 3 females are selected, and this equal proportion of gender is compatible with the word “Tri” that represents three truths of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism.

1.3) Choreograph

Researcher composes the movements by applying improvisation and concept of postmodern dance based on everyday movement. Contact improvisation technique is applied to focus on gravity law and energy leverage among performers. Concept of minimalism is also applied to focus on simple movement. Moreover, dance also include Eastern dance that apply the skill of twisting joints of arm, hand, leg, and foot which is popular among Eastern people such as Thailand, India, and Myanmar.

1.4) Music

Musical instruments are exclusively selected to reflect the identity of Buddhism and Oriental world, including rhythmic instruments such as drums, bells, cymbals, and gongs. These musical instruments will be mixed with synthesized sounds to enhance uniqueness of sound dimensions. Sounds will be designed to be instrumental without main melodies to allow open minds of performers and audiences. Tones of sound design focuses on meditation, peaceful or calm conditions. At the end of performance, rhythmic instruments are used to control the beat of music and, thus creating variety and conveying symbolic passion of movement from performers to audiences.

1.5) Prop and performance crafts design

Researcher applies semiology based on relevant symbols of Buddhism which are lotus and candle, reflecting the apparent

relationship between Buddhism and society. Research exhibits lotus and its leaves, as well as flame from candle to present postmodern arts that conveys the message of straightforwardness that audiences can see from props.

1.6) Performance area

Researcher applies the concept of postmodern dance that revolutionized traditional performance in theatre. Researcher rather focuses on environments such as grass field, area in front of museum. Researcher has selected main hall, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Researcher also applies concept of site-specific art by utilizing space wisely in correspond to environment of communities and concerning about types of art that match available area. The space of performance illustrates realistic components such as structure of wood, steel, expanded metal, etc. Such area demonstrates exotic ambience according that no dance has been performed at this space before, thus promoting creative utilization of space.

1.7) Lighting design

Researcher utilizes features of light as tools to express emotion, feeling, events, ambience, senses of performers, etc. by applying color theory which include both cool and warm colors. Researcher has designed lighting in each act to perfectly represent meaning of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism. Natural ambience of candle light creates the unity of performance.

1.8) Costume design

Researcher considers costume as supporting components that complete performance based on concept of postmodernism and minimalism, focusing on unity and simplicity. White color reflects history of Buddhism which refers to purity and understanding of *Dhamma*. Costume design is inspired by flourished lotus leaves, using light cloth that promotes air circulation, convenient movement, and keeping. These attributes of costume are suitable for dance that illustrate researcher's concept to imply the faith of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism.

2. Concepts of dance

By studying dance from concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism, research can conclude main concepts based on 7 aspects of research questions which are Philosophy of Buddhism, Simplicity of postmodern dance, Creativity in dance, Symbols of dance, Theories of dance, music, and visual arts, Social reflection through dance, and Creative dance for children. Brief concepts of each aspect are as follows;

2.1) Philosophy of Buddhism

The truth of Buddhism, *Trilaksana* is the inspiration of dance creation. Conditions of *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (stress and conflict), and *Anatta* (non-self) are indispensable for all things in universe. This is the philosophy that encourages people in societies to accept common conditions of nature, the truth of emerging and impermanence.

2.2) Simplicity of postmodern dance

Researcher focuses on presenting minimalism or simplicity based on concept of postmodern dance. The dance minimizes details and promote characteristic of “pure dance” to be more outstanding, so called “dance for movement sake”.

2.3) Creativity in dance

There are a lot of artists that apply the concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism art such as painting, sculpture, architecture. However, such permanent art cannot perfectly demonstrate the true meaning of *Trilaksana*. Creativity through moving art can effectively elaborate *Dhamma* and differentiate art components. Moreover, creativity must comply with the right cultures and traditions so art can create attractiveness and encourage initiatives that support societies.

2.4) Symbols of dance

Symbol significantly affects postmodern art that consists of history and value so it is essential in dance creation that is one of empirical communication process that conveys symbolic message through white color, equipment such as lotus and candle. These symbols can be interpreted differently and are necessary for fulfilling the features of modern dance.

2.5) Theories of dance, music, and visual arts

There are a lot of art that are influenced by music and visual art, as illustrated in Buddhism history such as mural paintings that exhibit good and evil, Buddhism music or chanting. Dance, music, and visual art are interdependent so art masterpieces that involve these 3 factors can effectively reflect social and cultural circumstances.

2.6) Social reflection through dance

Trilaksana in Buddhism is sensitive concept so art that involve this perspective should concern about philosophy of religion as well as effects toward societies as a whole. *Trilaksana* reflects current social situations while societies also reflect various perspectives, especially current social situation that Buddhism is not the vital principle of people. Therefore, dance that involve Buddhism is the great way to demonstrate current social situation.

2.7) Creative dance for children

Youth of new generations have shown strong passion and attitude. They are bombarded with plenty of news that, more or less, affects their lives. Consequently, their perspectives toward art are also broadened, therefore, truth of *Trilaksana* and creation of art should be aligned and artists must concern about appreciation of audiences toward art. It can be concluded that, for new generation, dance is as essential as others media that are useful for bodies and minds of children.



Figure 1: *Act I Overture* (Photo of Researcher)



Figure 2: *Act II Anicca* (Photo of Researcher)



Figure 3: *Act III Dukkha* (Photo of Researcher)



Figure 4: *Act IV Anatta* (Photo of Researcher)



Figure 5: Dance exhibition (Photo of Researcher)

Feedbacks and recommendation from performance

There are 249 audiences who completed questionnaires in 2 days. They are encouraged to freely share criticism and recommendations toward dance and answered open-ended questions. Research has summarized such findings as follows;

1) Free criticism

Audiences have shared feedbacks about dance from concept of Trilaksana in Buddhism directly to researcher and performers in the following aspects;

1.1) This research applies concept of Buddhism to create dance by combining various theories so audiences are not clear which theories are presented in performance. Trilaksana is the common knowledge that is restructured under multidisciplinary studies. Despite

good concept in applying of Buddhism in dance is considered simple and straightforward, it is so complicated to explain.

1.2) Dance movement lacks diversity. By considering postmodern dance concept that researcher initially presented, audiences understand that dancing requires no complicated movement but simple dance that audiences can or cannot understand, thus broadening perspectives of some audiences who may not be aware of its implication. This can be the driver that encourages children to be interested in dance. It is not necessary that dance students must create complicated performance. This presentation is the example of simple art creation.

1.3) Audiences should be informed about history and background of postmodern dance because only a few audience can understand concept of such dancing art. People are not likely to understand performance as it requires interpretation and application of symbols which are not common.

1.4) Audiences recommend using chanting as a part of performance in order to promote their understanding that performance is related to Buddhism.

1.5) Critics commented that audiences who participated in dance are those who have strong interest in arts and cultures. This is the good sign that the event is the hub of dance lovers despite different perspectives toward performance based on experiences of audiences. This research concept is very interesting because normally arts that apply Buddhism concept are likely to be sculpture or carving. These Buddhism arts are kind of moving performance that enhances social wellness.

1.6) Feedbacks about dance study in Thailand shown that there are a lot of institutes that offer dancing art study and government should support these students, for instance, by offering job opportunities from many companies and promoting advanced study and research in many institutes as, currently, Chulalongkorn University is the only institute that provides doctoral dance course.

1.7) Critics shared that although moves in this performance are simple but performers need to exploit a lot of energy and

concentration to convey messages. They are well trained to specialize in moving and demonstrating quality performance. Critics admired that new generation has shown impressive development and involvement in dance. It is strongly believed that Buddhists are engaged in Buddhism principle regardless of age and status.

2) Criticism regarding open-ended questions is as follows;

2.1) Admiration toward universal concept that applies Buddhism to broaden perspective that art and culture can be combined.

2.2) Introduction statements by researcher are too fast.

2.3) Duration of performance is too long, should be briefed. Performers shown high concentration without tiredness despite long performance.

2.4) Researcher should explain clearly about postmodern dance and how it differs from other types of performance so as to enhance understanding of audiences.

2.5) Overall performance is great but printed program should be provided to audiences in order to explain about background and importance of this performance.

2.6) In case that researcher is able to apply knowledge to elaborate Buddhism principle, it is expected to be successful because this is one of rare performances.

2.7) This performance should be promoted.

2.8) Audiences have gained knowledge and idea in creating jobs.

Based on criticism of dance audiences “The Dance from concept of *Trilaksana* in Buddhism” shown outstanding concept in applying Buddhism perspective to create dance in form of Western art. The interesting point is that audiences shown strong acceptance toward concepts and creation of this dance and thought that this is the valuable knowledge worth sharing to Buddhists.

Conclusion

1. Recommendations

Researcher has recommendation about research findings as follows;

1.1) Pattern of dance has been developed from 8 aspects which include Script, Performers, Choreograph, Music design, Props and performance crafts, Performance area, Lighting design, and Costumes design. Researcher found that all 8 aspects are the vital factors for creation of dance or other types of art. In initiating art, modern artists should take these aspects into account and explain the rationale in selecting such aspects based on theories that that can be applied as reference in the future without bias.

1.2) Pattern of dance presented through postmodern dance. Researcher has considered pattern of dance in 2 aspects which are Eastern and Western dance, as well as everyday movement that is performed based on minimalism or simplicity which is commonly seen in postmodern art. However, a lot of artists have been misled by the concept of minimalism or simplicity. Minimalism is not about deducting relevant content that affect main theme of dance, but rather focuses on key concepts. By applying such inspiring concept to create dance, artist has to consider many factors. For instance, Royal dance cannot apply minimalism concept but folk dance is likely to demonstrate concept of minimalism or simplicity, depending on social and cultural contexts, as well as historical background of civilization.

1.3) Post-performance evaluation and analysis of close-ended and open-ended research. There are feedbacks about performance that application of Buddhism concept in art is very attractive as dance has long been related to religious beliefs. However, artist should concern about many aspects to convey relevant contents to audiences. Some dance cannot be exhibited in other places according to different beliefs. This reflects the concept that *Trilaksana* in Buddhism is the common perspective that can be applied in Buddhism art, creating belief, spirit, or religious lesson that enhance more understanding about principle of living based on Buddhism

both in terms of mundane and *Dhamma* perspectives.

2. Suggestion for further research

Researcher provides suggestion as follows;

2.1) More concepts of Buddhism should be studied, such as The Five Aggregates, The Four Noble Truths, Four Sublime States of Mind, etc. to promote creative idea of dance. Moreover, concepts of other religions can be applied to create dance that depict religious history.

2.2) Creation of dance in this research provides not only concept of creative performance development, but also demonstrates attributes of postmodern dance. By considering body movement based on minimalism perspective, researcher found that this concept can be applied for other dance or similar types of art. However, there is no valid reference of research that refers to application of postmodern dance and minimalism. It is recommended that these concepts be used to inspire other types of art.

2.3) This research should be broadened to the area of artists performance by applying linguistics to study pattern or structure of dance or so called “pure dance” that focuses only on body movement, not emotion or content.

2.4) Concepts of 7 aspects of dance can be applied as the inspiring model for creating Buddhism-related art. Performance of distinctive artists can be the guideline for further development of dance and teaching purpose, especially for the objectives to sustain and develop dance which is the wisdom of human worldwide.

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