

**Pichet Klunchun Dance Company**  
**in Contemporary Thailand and the Global Stage**

**by**

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

“I, Sun Tawalwongsri, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief. It contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material, which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text”

Sun Tawalwongsri

19 November 2013

## Abstract

**TITLE** Pichet Klunchun Dance Company in Contemporary Thailand and the Global Stage: A Case Study of *Black and White* (2011)

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This thesis aims to study Pichet Klunchun and his dance company (Pichet Klunchun Dance Company) in order to understand the development of contemporary dance performance in Thailand. Klunchun has developed his own dance style and choreographies based on his expertise in *khon* (Thai classical masked dance). *Black and White* was selected as a case study of this thesis. The choreographic process and creative process of its theatrical elements exhibit his inspiration and contemporary interpretations of the fundamentals of *khon*.

This thesis investigates how *khon* and its body are understood, experienced and employed in the dance studio and on stage. At a primary level, I address Thai contemporary dance and *khon* from a historical perspective and use literature from the field of dance studies to provide a contemporary perspective on the importance of *khon* within Thai cultural identity. Through research, observations, interviews and analysis with dancers and other associated project coordinators within *Black and White*, and through personal experience as a contemporary dance practitioner, I assert that *khon* and its elements are fundamental in empowering Thai artists to elevate *khon* into an internationally recognised dance movement.

This thesis is composed of five chapters. Chapter One is an introduction contemporary dance trends in Thailand, how these have emerged, been influenced, adapted and progressed. Chapter Two centres on Pichet Klunchun, as the central figure in the revival of *khon* within Thai contemporary dance, analysing some of his solo dances and collaborative works with international artists. Within Chapter Three the spotlight falls on his company and analysis of their performances and choreographies. The Chapter Four and Five describe and analyse *Black and White* as a ground-breaking modernisation of traditional Thai masked dance.

Through an in-depth understanding of the stages of a traditional *khon* performance, Pichet Klunchun was able to successfully re-invent and re-interpret *khon*, including the choreographic process, the creative process behind the masks and costumes and re-imagining of the music and lighting. This study illustrates how *Black and White* as an innovative re-interpretation of *khon*, has not only built on the knowledge base of contemporary dance but in turn has shifted the direction of contemporary Thai dance and has had a significant impact on the world dance movement.

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# Introduction

This dissertation arises out of my aims to scrutinise and to understand contemporary dance in Thailand in relation to global cultural influences. At present, Thai contemporary dance is harmonised not only by Thai and other Asian cultures, but also Western (Euro-American) cultures and other performance traditions. In addition, it integrates diverse styles and forms of dance, theatre, music and other theatrical performances. Through the lenses of cultural performance and dance studies recently, it seems remarkable and popular that contemporary dance platform is a progressing process of cultural meeting both of traditional and contemporary performers. Through its collaborative process and practice, it has expanded especially in the areas of international performance festival territory.

Yet, these practices also influence Thai contemporary stage creators. It is indisputable that contemporary dance-making process and its product can generate hybrid or new experimental forms. As result of its inventive or creative process that mingles and interchanges cultural theatrical elements frequently, these cultural events can encourage and promote diverse cultural understanding and respect. In contradiction, the continuation of cultural exchanges can somehow be an appropriation without the cultural understanding and considering cultural performance as a tourist product or commodity. However, certain Thai stage creations have also taken advantage of this process. Thai stage artists have manipulated not only traditional forms of performing art but also others cultural adaptation and appropriation to develop their performance innovations.

In Thailand, the word and application of “Thai contemporary dance” has been constructed as a dance genre. The mainstream of contemporary performance generally focuses on the hybrid model that integrates Thai dance forms with the other styles of dances. Nonetheless because of its diversity, this term can be recognised and understood as a new platform and practices rather than categorised as specific genres of dance performance. The dance research into performers’ body and capability, creative dance-making process through contemporary dance can hardly be found in an amount of Thai dance research because the researchers frequently pay attention to the historical research of Thai classical performances. Therefore, the negotiation in many levels of dance making or insight of contemporary performance company (between director/ choreographer, performer, designer and cultural agency/ promoter) is negligible for Thai dance historians. In contrast, the progression of Thai contemporary performance over ten years leads to generate the profusion of its research and discourse in the global recognition.

In consideration of this, the thesis aims to study Pichet Klunchun and his dance company emphasising on the production of *Black and White* (2011) as the case study of this thesis. His dance works contribute to the discourses of contemporary dance performance involving Thai dance tradition, globalisation and also postcolonial experiences. Meanwhile, his staging often attempts to acknowledge *khon*, Thai masked dance-drama for the international understanding in many dance festivals. As consequence of his collaborations with international artists particularly in Asia, Klunchun performance praxis and its research bring

about global issues such as cultural exchanges, “Pan-Asia”, “Pan-Southeast Asia” and so forth. For instance, his various projects and creations such as *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2006-2009), *Chui Chai* (2010), *Nijinsky Siam* (2010) and *Black and White* (2011) were awarded grants from the art festival to collaborate with other divergent Asian and European artists. His dance works, which are performed both on Thai and international stages, are cultural phenomena. In this early twenty first century, his dance company became a renowned contemporary dance company, which has skilful *khon* dancers. Moreover, all of his company works can represent the characteristic of Thai identity and reflect contemporary thought and interpretation in the age of globalisation.

This thesis explores Pichet Klunchun Dance Company highlighting on how the company reinvent and reinterpret *khon*, Thai classical masked dance in various directions. Pichet Klunchun, the company director and founder, utilises this dance vocabulary to perform in other styles of presentation or outer boundary of its performance tradition such as Thai dance with live performance, dialogue and media technology. His work is exemplary and argumentative at the same time in viewpoints of performance scholars, critics and both Thai and international viewers. Pichet by himself, for instance, oftentimes performs by using Thai traditional masked dance techniques without its associated costumes. Moreover, he appears sometimes on stage nearly nude or with modern clothes such as blue jeans without a top. These appearances seem as a unique or exotic performance to demonstrate the pure dance art form in the Western perspective. Some

conservative attitudes by the Thai audience and performance academic criticise his dance and sometimes discredit Thai dance tradition.

I studied *Black and White* (2011) as the exemplary company repertoires. These instances can be scrutinised the manifestation of modernising *khon* with new approaches. Moreover, I searched for his collaborative process in the international festival to reflect the juxtaposition of *khon* dance in the world contemporary performance. Nevertheless, his provocative staging continues to reflect the reduction of Thai dance functionality and tradition and arouse suddenly its conservative paradigm. As Klunchun's statement supports, "I am going to do cultural war" and "my work is an opening game with the old culture (Thai dance)" (Klunchun, 2003). His performance outside the scope of Thai dance tradition, however, opened the alternative ways of performance, which can develop and preserve this dance tradition in the other directions as a result of the diversity of cultural performance origins in Thailand with widespread styles of dance and theatrical techniques, which Thai performers study and practice currently. Thai classical dance, ballet, modern and contemporary dance and other traditional Asian dance styles are offered as diverse subjects in both of theoretical and practical class either of dance educational institutions or individual dance companies. The Thai performer and dancer can integrate diverse dance practices and its cultures through their bodies and minds.

## Dissertation Structure

The thesis is constructed in five chapters. Chapter one is separated into two parts. The first part deals with the overview of contemporary dance theatre focusing on its movement and its evaluation. This part will demonstrate the similarities and differences of understanding contemporary dance theatre both in the West and Thailand. Then the following part is a narrow scope highlighting Western dance influences and practices particularly the introduction of classical ballet in Thailand. It allows me to investigate how contemporary dance practices have emerged, been influenced, adapted and progressed. With these backgrounds I can understand the evolution and trends of contemporary dance practices in Thailand.

Chapter Two is tracing a childhood of Pichet Klunchun who is the key person of Thai contemporary dance in the thesis. I conducted an investigation into his life, his dance learning particularly *khon* training both outside and inside school curriculums, including the method of Thai dance training. Then I examined his development in terms of theatrical experiences and working with many acclaimed Thai and international artists. Afterwards, I drew on his professional growth, his decision to be a university dance teacher until challenging himself to be a professional dance artist in the end. With his biography, I can illustrate the juxtaposition of his development and comprehend his personal attitude to current contemporary dance in Thailand. All of these materials will be a conception of framework to scrutinise his dance works.

Accordingly, chapter three of this thesis deals with the establishment of Pichet Klunchun Dance Company. There are two periods in his company's development. In 2004, he established his first company named Life Work Company. Later it was renamed to be Pichet Klunchun Dance Company and has been the name up to this day. The chapter's structure provides the history overview of his companies. I centre on his dance company and select his significant dance works in each period to describe and analyse his process of contemporary dance making. In addition, some socio-cultural contexts between the choreographer and collaborators with Thai society and global community are investigated. His selected dance works such as *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004) and *Nijinsky Siam* (2010) are not only a manifestation of *khon* dancing in contemporary dance platform, but they also exhibit his harmonising of diverse theatrical elements whether derived from the origins of *khon* or not. For instance, his dance story or narrative plot does not adhere to only the *khon* story, Ramakien. His works is unconventional in terms of *khon* performance. Whether Thai, Asian or Western - theatrical elements and aspects can be experimented in his dance-making process without restriction.

In Chapter Four, the spotlight falls on *Black and White* (2011) as a groundbreaking modernisation of traditional Thai masked dance. Indeed, this production is a phenomenon to profoundly research into Thai contemporary performance by means of *khon* dance body. Thus, this dissertation will include the consideration of artistic dance practices and performers' body into the research. The chapter starts with the inspiration of choreographic process that is derived



from the murals painting of Ramakien. In order to make the creating the two-dimensional battle images to be three-dimensional visualisation through dance movement, these materials will be explored and experimented in creative process accompanying many aspects of *khon* dancing particular in the fighting scene and its postures. In the last section of this chapter, there will be a comparison of the choreographies and dance postures between traditional *khon* dance and the modern choreography of *Black and White* in various dimensions.

The company dance practices and styles can be indicated as hybridity or syncretistic or fusion. This is because of their use of various kinds of indigenous theatrical practices and foreign materials. For instance, in Thai classical dance, *khon* mask, Thai shadow puppet image has been combined as principle elements of some of his experimental work. However, all of these diverse techniques are also dependent upon the collaborative performer's artistry and their background. Likewise, this can refer to "the postmodern process of commenting on cultural fragments" in James Brandon's term (92). However, the company hybridised representations by the way of searching profoundly indigenous and traditional performance in their own cultures and playing with the perception and understanding of international audience can be a revitalisation of the 'own' theatre.

In Chapter Five, the last chapter, I discuss and analyse other visual aesthetics in *Black and White* performance such as the modern *Khon* masks and costumes of each characters. In this section, the reader can understand how Klunchun and the company collaborate with other artists and designer to rework the modern theatrical presentation based on the knowledge and comprehending

the stylised theatrical elements of traditional *khon*. Finally, the conclusion will analyse and conclude the findings of the case study, its impact and other relations reflected to contemporary performance in Thai society and the globalised world. This dissertation puts a strong emphasis on its contents which discuss principally the dance-making process, its socio-cultural contexts and its relations rather than considering whether the company dance works are successful or not. As the result of this dissertation, I will be able to comprehend the juxtaposition of Thai contemporary dance, which continually embodies outstanding artistic practices. In addition, the analysis of the cultural characteristic of collaborative dance making demonstrates the identity of Thai contemporary dance, which is not only exceptional in Thailand but also on the world stage.

The main focus of this thesis is to study the process and/or praxis of dance making and stage production of contemporary dance theatre in Thailand by starting with an explanation of how contemporary performance has been introduced to Thailand at recent of time. Data collection and analysis relate to historical overview of Thai dance and theatre, which have been developed and transformed through different period of time are provided. This development has been dominated by significant institutions for instance the monarchy, the national stage, the government, educational institutes and the like, up until the term of “contemporary dance or contemporary performance” has emerged presently as a new performance platform in the country. The socio-political and socio-cultural situations of the nation in different periods have affected an evolution of Thai performance traditions, cultures and their creations. The Thai cultural

performances and popular entertainments are distinctively separated as dichotomous cultural settings between “High” and “Low” cultures, mainly based on the social stratum of the theatregoers. Elizabeth G. Traube (130) refers to Herder’s term of ‘popular culture’, he categorises this term as “Low culture”, which is an irrational culture while ‘High culture’ being a rational culture, owned by well-educated people. This cultural and social dichotomy is slightly swayed and altered through different periods as Court versus Popular, Elite (nobility) versus Peasant, National state (or government) versus local people, Urban versus Rural, Central versus Periphery and so forth. Today’s social stratum in Thailand has been complicated and transformed in multiple dimensions according to their social status, education, income and community. These inheritances of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ positions on Thai social class, however, remained continuously, which can be understood through a representation of performance creations and theatregoers.

It is noticeable that contemporary dance theatre in Thailand is interrelated in the complicated border of social and cultural dichotomies. Recently, the western concept and trend of dance theatre performance through its globalisation is a great influence on Thai contemporary dance creations as a new performance platform. Paradoxically, contemporary performance can be placed as a popular culture rather than “high culture” in the country while often performance materials and contents somewhat rooted from “high culture” and traditional performance especially dance theatre form. This is because the creators and dancers are based on their traditional dance practices such as an example of classical Thai

dance or classical ballet, which are claimed as “high” culture in general. In addition, well-educated artists for middle class audiences produce most of contemporary performances. The rise of new target audiences the so-called “Thai middle class” nowadays has become interested in this kind of performance. This new artistic tastes and new performance innovations have come to serve the cultural and entertaining demand of this social stratum. The education, economic and income are important factors for theatregoers in contemporary Thai society. This thesis can be a pathway for understanding how to produce innovative performance creation and how to activate the preservation of Thai theatrical traditions and cultures at the same time. As a result of this, Thai audiences associated with “Popular” or “Low” culture can also appreciate the ‘high’ (tradition) culture through all sorts of contemporary contexts in contemporary dance theatre.

Likewise, Giddens points out the idea of tradition in modernity by exemplifying “a post-traditional society”. In his viewpoint, he argues that it seems generally to be contrary positioning between modernity and tradition, but in fact modernity has reconstructed tradition within it by disguising in other transformation (Giddens, 57). The continuing progress of Western hegemony, the expansion of modern institutions through globalisation process and the process of international change are significant illustration in this sense. Although it appears that modernity demolishes tradition, he attends to a combination between modernity and tradition for an understanding step of modern social development (Giddens 91). This concept can reflect and criticise the boundary of performing arts in Thailand as dance works of Pichet Klunchun. It is obviously seen that the modern or innovative

Thai performances often play with some elements of reworking and reinventing traditional form.

Pavis mentions that the participant observer should concentrate on that, indeed, “all performance traditions are always more or less hybrid” (2003, p.274). There is no one ideology of “purity” or absolute setting of aesthetic standard and artistic performance traditions, which can be applied to analyse universally and equally to all works of art in different societies. By the challenging ways of innovative contemporary dance theatre in Thailand through the collaborative process in Klunchun’s works currently have been more fascinated inventors, performers and spectators to develop this contemporary platform and its community. This is because increasing a number of intensive trained dance and performers in various styles of dance and theatrical techniques including interest of spectators in contemporary performance as a new experience.

This thesis, thus, investigates the collections of contemporary dance theatre in Thailand. In addition, academic documents and its criticisms both published and unpublished are examined, mostly based on documentary research and personal interviews. I mostly conducted archival and documentary researches and interviews with directors, choreographers, dancers and practitioners who have recently created and performed stage productions in my case studies in Thailand, while some part of the documentary research was done in the Library of Royal Holloway, University of London and the SOAS Library (School of Oriental and African Studies) of the University of London. However, the numerous stage productions of contemporary dance performance in Thailand created both in public

/ private dance school and in other dance companies apart from my case study for educational and individual purposes are excluded from this study.

## **Research Methodology**

This qualitative research aims to explore the issues of contemporary dance in Thailand, particularly concentrating on Pichet Klunchun Dance Company through the case study of *Black and White* (2011). There are extensive four purposes:

1. To discover and investigate distinctions of company performance, dance styles and forms, creator's inspirations through qualitative inquiry and questions of contemporary perspective

2. To learn and explore the choreographic process and how it will be occurred in contemporary dance making and increased its recognition in the company of case study and global dance community

3. To understand and find the increasing or diversifying perspectives of *khon* Thai classical mask dance both explicitly and implicitly utilising in Thai contemporary dance performance and comparing with current global performance makings

4. To explore how *khon* dance techniques and their theatrical elements might be promoted as an exotic and cultural trend to market compellingly both in the country and world stages

Owing to the fact that there is a dearth of performance research in Thailand especially fieldwork research and contemporary dance performance, this

motivation leads me to conduct my research design and objective to study Phichet Klunchun Dance Company. In this research, I selected the company performance *Black and White* (2011) as a case study of to employ a particular and distinct workplace setting. The company has it own identities and developments in performance practices. The choreographer/director and dancers/performers are the main reasons I elaborately observed in different levels of contexts through the actions and interactions in between the participants and themselves, and me and locations as a context of study. Regarding the site or setting of the case study I particularly concentrated on the rehearsals and performance spaces of the company. Moreover, through investigating intrinsic / insight of participants in the case study, the “ethnographic procedures allow us to grasp subjective aspects of life that other procedures neglect” (Burns, 2000, p.395). Methodology and components of an ethnographic approach are outlined in this research emphasising participant observation, ethnographic reflection, being immersed in the case study and its communities as a company member, participant, observer, volunteer and also as a researcher.

I will apply the ethnographic methodology of dance to draw on my experiences as collaborator, dancer, performer and co-worker with all of my company case studies both in the past and the fieldwork of this project. This research fieldwork has centred on the structures of diverse forms and systems of movements in contemporary dance company. The analysis of staging of this specific dance and company at first glance can lead to understanding and learning of dance movements in specific contexts of the society. Meanwhile, the profound

researches of process, practice and its community through participant observation allow us to understand the philosophy of community, aesthetic and cultural values. Moreover, the concept of dance, tangible and intangible/abstract manifestations of these findings can reach to learn and understand the other systems of knowledge involved with contemporary performance.

In this research, the in-depth perspectives and my relationships between the company members are crucial. This is because the immersed understanding of the internal perspective and each personal opinion can reflect and express the individual's and group's professional working method from their natural settings. In terms of participant observation, I have immersed myself in the life of the theatrical and cultural group through active participation of the company dance trainings and rehearsals.

As a drama and dance lecturer, with many dance practises and experiences both in the western and Thai classical styles, I have distinctive knowledge and capability to handle this research. With direct experience as a professional dance performer, I have a more profound insider/ internal perspective to analyse the dance making process of this case study.



# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to Contemporary Dance in Thailand

### 1.1 Introduction

Convenient transportation and technological communication unify the world. It seems that we have become one global community with persuasions, beliefs and convictions dictated by the modern life style. Through processes of modernisation and globalisation, we encounter with apprehension global culture by many chance means in our every day life. Diverse cultures are consumed and integrated easily. These processes inevitably influence and affect all domains of dance, theatre and performance in the world. Dance is one of the oldest art forms, which developed in prehistoric times as a natural expression of human and action. It changes over time. Dance has been developed and branched into many forms and styles in diverse cultures and different places.

Contemporary dance platforms around the world do not equate to any particular dance styles or genres. Because of a huge range of diverse styles of dance nowadays creators can integrate various kinds of dance and theatrical materials in order to invent her/his own signature dance practices. The word *contemporary* is not simply to define within the broader world context as things that are new, fresh, up-to-date, *avant-garde*, cutting edge, current or meant to be modern and in step with the times. Today's the contemporary dance platform is more worldwide and inclusive than ever before. It frequently unites diverse dance styles; ballet, jazz, hip hop, an influence of folk or ethnic world dance including any number of unidentified styles. The platform does not have specific dance

movements, styles and patterns. The dancer can make use of diverse movement techniques that have trained their physical abilities in order to seek and develop the new dance forms and dynamics. Not only is the dance movement unconventional, but also its structure of performance, dance space and other performance elements do not fix within one performance tradition. It might be performed on traditional stages such as a proscenium, an arena and a thrust stage or be displayed on non-traditional theatre as site-specific dance in unusual places. Moreover, the dance creators can exploit numerous conversations with other aesthetic elements such as dramatic texts, poetry, mime, circus, visual or fine arts, lighting, music, multimedia works, architecture and others.

In a sense of Western dance perspective, “contemporary dance” perhaps embedded in its antecedent, which is “modern dance.” John Martin (1893-1985), the first dance critic at the *New York Times* appoints the first-generation of modern dance in his book, *The Modern Dance* (1933). He mentions that modern dance has a “desire to externalize personal, authentic experience, it is evident that the scheme of modern dancing is all in the direction of individualism and away from standardization” (299). After World War I, many American artists and choreographers were aroused by rapid societal changes, the technology of the machine age, the boom of the 1920s, and the depression of the 1930s. They questioned about the social, political, and aesthetic issues of the day and employed any opportunities to define a new role of arts in the United States. Modern dancers demonstrated primitive body-movements, self-expression, and also the social pressure through their dance practices. These individuals of

American dancers were announced for possibilities of mass appeal and participation (Foulkes 2-3). This expansive period of modern dance encouraged Martin to research. He declared, “the American dance has come of age” (Martin, *New York Times*). The individualism and unique dance styles of many choreographers that he analysed, however, can construct their own standard bearers if these carry down to next generation over time. Later on the forms of modern dance can be the materials of postmodernist to reject and rebel against (Strauss, introduction XII).

Likewise, Wilks (10) states that *Contemporary Dance* “takes many forms, each teacher or choreographer evolving their own individual way of moving by experimenting with current ideas, keeping what seems right and discarding old-fashioned or unhelpful material.” Thus it needs to be constantly enriched and changed in order to react within the society and culture that it is situated. With this perspective, contemporary dance puts a strong emphasis on exploring the connection between mind and body through dances, which push against any traditional boundaries. In the West, the roots of contemporary dance can be found in modern dance of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the search for a freer form of dance expression. The ideas of dance innovations can be influenced and initiated from both conscious or unconscious emulation, rejection even building upon the ground of others accomplish dance works from pass or same generation. The theoretical foundation of modern dance in 20<sup>th</sup> century stemmed from the dance teachings of 19<sup>th</sup> century for instance European cognitive and movement theories of Francios Delsarte (1811-1871), Emile Jaques-

Dalcroze (1865-1950) and Rudolf Von Laban (1879-1958). Including American Modern forerunners such as Isadora Duncan (1877-1927), Loïe Fuller (1862-1928), Ruth St. Denis (1879-1968) and Ted Shawn (1891-1972) were influenced (Brown, Mindlin and Charles 3, Foulkes 8-10, Reynolds and McCormick 1-30, Strauss 1-7).

In the first period these modern dancers have been developed their own styles of presentation to revolt against the classical ballet. They refused the restrictions of stylised classical ballet technique, dance costumes and point shoes. They created a new form of solo dance called “aesthetic” or “barefoot” dance (Reynolds and McCormick 1). The fixed poses, artificial gestures and any decorative details with make static ballet (classical dance) traditions are all abandoned. For instance, Duncan and St. Denis wore bloomers without their corsets. These costumes release their legs and torsos more freedom made the liberation from binding clothes in the dance field. Modern dance allowed young women to release psychically from their strict rearing and physically from Victorian notions of women’s bodily weakness. In the first decade of the twentieth century, this liberation was expansive beyond live performances and movies. It was appearing in the dance halls, settlement homes and public parks of main cities such as New York in United States (Foulkes 11). Modern dancers expressed a freedom and liberation in their art; they released their bodies to dance by rejecting all the conventions of Victorian and classical ballet dance costume; they sought to combine movements and expressions, finally, they searched for their “individuality” (Brown, Mindlin and Charles 4). The turn of the century, Isadora Duncan, Loïe

Fuller and Ruth St. Denis can all represented the ideas of new (American) woman who battled for more public roles and the right to vote including “an embrace of free love, looser sexual mores and unfettered movement” (Foulkes 10). They all focused in rebelliousness and this aspect became a strong characteristic of modern dance pioneers at the first time. Modern dancers turned to seek new ways to freely express the energy and liveliness through free forms of movement and to explore more directly insights into a substance of significant movements (Wilks 10). In United States, modern dancers appealed and enlarged their audiences from working class in labour unions to townsfolk in rural areas by developing their art forms with in the democratic, pluralist Popular Front thrust of the times. Both aesthetic and social conventions were the contents of modern dancers to insulting. Then their objectives were moved to choose iconoclasm, conforming their art to intellectual ideals in the post-war years (Foulkes 5).

The choreographic processes of classical and contemporary dance forms are extremely different. The conventional process of choreography, whether in classical ballet, jazz dance or non-western classical dance forms, involves the dancers (or students) imitating dance movements and a set of dance routines from the choreographer or the dance master (in Thai traditional dance). In this process, the dancer looks similar to a puppet (object) of a choreographer or a receptor, while the choreographer is a manipulator and a creator. In the passive role of dancer, the performer must practise dance phrases repeatedly to interpret with accuracy dance repertoires. Contemporary dance-making processes and creative dance teaching styles move away from this conventional framework.

Contemporary practices increase the degree of dancers or students' creativity so that they can contribute to the choreographic process. With this active and creative approach, the dancer can become an initiator, a collaborator, as well as a co-creator with others, whilst the choreographer's role is changed from a creator to a facilitator and a chooser. The choreographer gives the tasks or a set of ideas to the dancers and then allows them to create or improvise their own dance movements. Later dance movements are chosen, formed and adjusted in collaboration with the choreographer in order to solve the physical problems of composing a dance. This shifted framework and sharing of the roles between dancer and choreographer in choreographic process has been utilised progressively by many dance companies and dance educational institutions in the world dance circles.

In Thailand, the term *Contemporary Dance* is recognised as a new genre of avant-garde dance performance. There are few artistic dance productions and little research emphasising the contemporary dance. As a consequence of a small numbers of professional dance artists, scholars, and artistic dance performances in this category, there are limitations and ambiguities of understanding "*Contemporary Thai Dance*". Most Thai scholars inaccurately tend to identify Contemporary Thai Dance as a fusion or a hybrid dance form. Scholars such as Srichalakom (2000), Virulrak (2006) and Makpa (2012) defectively define this term as a form of dance created by the combination of Thai classical dance with other dance styles into choreographic process. Likewise, Charassi (2007) identifies *Contemporary Dance* as dancing created in the present time by integrating Thai

dance and other dance styles from diverse cultures and different periods to perform at the same time (13). In addition, Srichalakom explains further that Contemporary Thai Dance not only integrates various dance forms and techniques but also “concepts, terms, principles and how the movement has been choreographed and by whom” were centred on its choreographic process (1). All these perspectives of Thai dance academics however were shaped and constructed a static paradigm of Contemporary Thai Dance especially in the creative process of dance making particularly in higher educational settings in Thailand. Dance students tend to place formalistic emphasis on how to integrate other dance practices with Thai dance rather than concentrating on movement quality or content of performance, which can reflect and criticise the current society.

In an article of Pichet Klunchun, a Thai contemporary dance maker, “*What is Contemporary Dance?*” he argues against the aforementioned definitions of Contemporary Thai Dance. He asserts “Contemporary Thai Dance is the new dance form originated from Thai Dance by least borrowing or no appropriation of the others’ dance forms in order to provide Thai traditional art forms can convey with current people.” Moreover, it can bring into focus social criticism and private or public issues such as politics, social structure, gender, religion, and beliefs or up-to-date issues. Merely concentrating on definitions of Contemporary Thai Dance by categorising it as a combination of stylistic dance forms, leads to a restriction of understanding, interpreting and perceiving this performance genre. It is inaccurate to mention and recognise only a hybrid dance form—the combination

of Thai and other dance styles. This freezes Contemporary Thai Dance in a static pattern. In fact, Thais have adopted the term *contemporary dance* from the concepts and terms of western dance styles in last few decades in order to adapt and reinvigorate their own dance performance.

Contemporary Thai Dance progression nowadays resembles the development process of Western contemporary dance in the early period of twentieth century. Recent Thai choreographers and dance artists, mostly based in Bangkok, have attempted to change, modify, resist and move away from the forms of Thai classical dance or their own dance traditions and practices. As the contemporary dancers can create, choreograph and improvise their own movements for communicating individual's personal experiences. Thus frequently they take influences from a multitude of materials such as social, cultural and political changes including other dance cultures to invent unconventional choreographic moves. The contemporary dance-making process and its development have depended on dancer's own stylistic dance training and their associated traditions. Various factors were shaped the form of Contemporary Thai Dance. These can rely on a choreographer's own dance experience, the policy of international and national cultural organisations even if the development of dance teaching and researches in higher education. The development of Contemporary Thai Dance perhaps can scrutinise its antecedent, which are Classical Ballet and Thai dance.



## 1.2 The classical ballet in Thai style

Introduction of the western dance styles principally classical ballet in Thailand had impacted and influenced Thai dance performance, which can trace the origin of Contemporary Thai Dance styles. Inspiring and imitating a cross between Thai and Western dance cultures and its practices are one method of dance creation that Thai dance artists often employed. Tracing to the combination of dance movements in Thai classical ballet that exhibited the process of appropriations of gestures and hand movements in Thai classical dance to invent the Ballet in Thai style. Likewise, there are also different combinations that intermingle Thai dance form with other styles of western dance technique such as Jazz dance, Modern dance and Contemporary dance. Nonetheless as like as mention above mere the appropriation of Thai dance gestures into choreographic routine of western dance styles do not identify these hybrid forms as a key principle of *Contemporary Thai Dance*.

Due to the modernisation under Western influence in the reign of King Chulalongkorn Rama V (1853-1910), there were several genres of Thai dramatic arts particular in *lakhon* styles were manifested the inspiration of Western performance for instance *lakhon phan tang*, *lakhon dukdamban*, *lakhon rong*, and *lakhon put* (Rutnin 12). The art of ballet dancing presumably introduced to Thailand through the performance of “opera-ballet” from the West. In 1891 after the journey in Europe of Chao Phraya Thewetwongwiwat, he introduced the western opera-

ballet inspiration into his creation of *lakhon dukdamban*<sup>1</sup> with Prince Naris. There are many Western influences in the musical creation *lakhon dukdamban*. Prince Naris utilised Western chorus styles in Thai music composition moreover create the specific orchestra, mixing between Thai and Western orchestra instruments, so-called *piphat*<sup>2</sup> *dukdamban*. The term of performers techniques, the dancer-singers were diminished some dance vocabularies and shift concentration to sing and narrative. He desired to adapt the form and techniques of opera-ballet into Thai *lakhon* by using Thai plays and Thai classical music in order to perform them in a form of opera combines ballet (Rutnin 126). However, there were all a sense of inspiration and imitating of western performance form, no have any document to affirm that there was ballet teaching in Thailand at that time.

Until in 1932 the period of king Rama VII, Siam (Thailand) had political change from absolute monarchy to democracy with a constitutional monarchy. The first duty of new democratic government in the domain of arts was to transfer all of departments and divisions of royal courts to the government. As the consequence in 1933, Krom Silpakorn (Department of Fine Arts) was establish to transfer and

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<sup>1</sup>*Lakhon dukdamban* was created by Prince Nariasaranuwattiwong, brother of King Chulalongkorn and ChaoPhraya Thewetwongwiat, chief of the *Krom Mahorasop* (Department of Royal Entertainment) in 1891. Its development separated in the three periods. The first was a dramatic musical suite, inspiring and imitating the model of western “royal command concert.” Later period was imitating the “tableau vivant” of the Western theatre to compose a musical suit with live characters in still poses scene by scene. The last period after Chao Phraya Thewetwongwiat journeyed in Europe, he introduced the western opera-ballet inspiration into his creation of *lakhon dukdamban* with Prince Naris. This inherited style and model became to revive and preserve until today by the descendent of Prince Naris at the Wang Plai Noen Palace (Rutnin 124-126).

<sup>2</sup> *Piphat* is a kind of ensemble in Thai classical music features wind and percussion instruments.

take charge all royal arts and cultural activity from *Krom Mahorasop*<sup>3</sup> (Department of Royal Entertainment) to become the national heritage. Under the direction of government at that time, Major-General Luang Wichitwathakan (1898-1962), an advisor of Revolution Party, was the first director of Krom Silpakorn. He established a national theatre in order to expose the high art forms of dance, drama and music, which had previously been limited to the royal court and aristocracy to the public. During his direction in the first stage many productions of Krom Silpakorn were therefore the products of Westernisations under France influence (Rutnin 238). In this stage, the royalist status had diminished its authority nevertheless the new Thai government and bureaucracy constructed and revived the court arts, they appeared the direction of Thai nationalism at that time (Damrhung 242-243).

Through a suggestion of Luang Wichitwathakan and his deeply inspiration on France model of l'École des Beaux-Arts and l'Académie Royale de Danse et Musique, in 1934, the conservatory school of dance and music was set up, so-called Rongrain Nataduriyangkhasat (Rutnin 189). Although the school of performing arts in the developed country has been grown in a very long time such as France, the establishment of a school of dance and music in this manner for the first time in Thailand make many problems for him. As he states that

The Rongrain Nataduriyangkhasat was established among a crisis of bad gossip. There are charges in all directions from every

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<sup>3</sup> *Krom Mahorasop* is the Department of Royal Entertainment which support by royal courts and was ceased in the reign of King Rama VII in 1926 after economic crisis of the country.

newspaper, since never have this kind of school in Thailand. Working make a living as a performer or dancer is regarded as lower classes. Although it is recognised in many developed countries, but it is also seen unsuitable with us (Thais) (Wichitwathakan 53).

The first generation students of the school have been enrolled in high school level approximately fifteenth years old. The course is divided into four subject areas, which are Thai Dance, Western Dance (Ballet), Thai Music and Western Music. After the school had teaching for four years, there was an official opening ceremony of school on 1 June 1938. At the moment, Madame Sawastanaban<sup>4</sup> taught the ballet major students. She created ballet performances for the school throughout from 1934 until the school was close due to the World War II in 1941 (Boongpeng 18). The school has changed its names<sup>5</sup> throughout several times. In 1945 after the end of World War II, the school was reopened, the Prime Minister commanded to update the school's education and renamed the "School of Dramatic Art" (Rongrain Natasin). It is also known under the name of "College of Dramatic Art" or Witthayalai Natasin after being raised as an institution of higher education or college. This is the beginning of teaching ballet in earnest on the Thai educational system.

Since about 1947, the integration between Thai classical dance and Ballet dance movements emerged obviously. Sricharakom argues this period is the first

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<sup>4</sup> Madame Sawastanaban is unidentified nationality married to Thai man. She presumably was a first person who taught classical ballet at the College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok, Thailand. (Chalanukhro cited in Boongpeng 18)

<sup>5</sup> From Rongrain Nataduriyangkhasat to Rongrain Silapakorn in 1935, to Rongrain Sang-khitsin 1942, and to Rongrain Natasin in 1945

fundamental phase of Contemporary Thai Dance (4). In addition to being Madame Sawastanaban who taught at the school dance of government (Wittayalai Natasin), there were ballet teachers who have Thai husband or follow her husband working for foreign embassies in Thailand. Ballet teachers who introduced classical ballet to Thai elites at this time consisting Mrs Gaulstin, Mrs. Mckay, and Khunying Genevieve L'Espagnol Damon. They taught ballet class in their private schools. Most of Thai classical ballet performances in this period were inspired and exploited Thai literature and Thai folk tales. Thai stories were adapted to be a ballet plot. The ballet master blended distinctive features of Thai dance motifs into their own ballet choreography in order to invent a unique style and identity of Thai ballet. For instance, *Vessandorn Chadok* (1959), *Ramakein* (1961), *Pang Prathom* (1977), *Pra Boo Thong* (1977), *Phra Aphaimani* (1986), *Matanapata* (1987, 1996), *Sri Pharch* (1992), *Sang Thong* (1992) and so forth were produced as classical ballet in Thai style to enrich this dance performance in Thailand (Srichalakom14-25).

However, the development of Thai classical ballet has been flourished by supporting under the royal patronage of his majesty the King of Thailand. The present reigning king, His Majesty King Bhumibol (Rama IX) was kind enough to create the ballet performance in Thai style. The king said to Khunying Genevieve L'Espagnol Damon, France-American ballet choreographer that the Thai story of *Manohra* seems resembles like the classical ballet story, *Swan Lake*. As a result of his kindness, *Manohra Ballet* (1962) was produced as the first Thai classical ballet style in the world, which integrated the classical ballet and Thai dance

(Virulrak 59). From 1962 until at present day, this is most famous Thai classical ballet performance. The premiere was performed on 5 January 1962 at the Annual Thai Red Cross Fair, Amporn Garden and had the special performance in front of the King and Queen of Denmark on 8 January. Moreover, this performance was filmed and lived television broadcast for Thais (Boonpeng 28). Khunying Genevieve L’Espagnol Damon, the original choreographer brought back this ballet to perform in many times, for instance at Thailand National Theatre in 1980, Phu Phan Rajanivet Palace in 1981, Bang Pa-in Royal Palace in 1982, Thailand Cultural Centre in 1992 and so forth. Both full scale of performances and some part of its dance repertoires have been restaged and reworks several times by other choreographers such as William Morgan and Vararom Pachimsawat (Srichalakom17). Nowadays this ballet works is well known and used for ballet teaching and performing in private dance schools and university dance departments in particular.

The present King Bhumibol composed the “*Kinari Suited Music*” especially for this ballet performance whist the Queen Sirikit was kind enough to Pierre Balmain designed four main sets of costumes for this ballet story, comprising of *Manohra*, the King *Phra Suton*, the *Naga* and the *Peacock*. The king and royal court of Thailand are powerful impacts with Thai performing arts territories. Not only the continuations of Thai traditional and classical dances are uninterrupted, but also the introduction and development of classical ballet in Thailand are strongly involved in the worship and influence of kingship in Thai culture. The classical ballet performance in Thailand has obtained the patronage of the Thai

monarchy and the royal family at the first stage led to ballet is widely accepted in the country. Moreover, ballet teaching in Thai educational institutions and family supports (an encouragement of the nobility and upper class in the early stages) are the factors have determined and encouraged the Thai classical ballet to continuously exist.

It is noticeable that most of the ballet teachers and choreographers were all came from abroad. To know deep roots in Thai classical dance especially in term of practice by themselves are difficult, therefore the combination in choreographic process tend to be borrowing of the spectacle and characteristic of Thai dance. This choreographic approach, however, can be considered as an appropriation, step-stealing or cultural transmission of Thai dance in order to invent Thai Classical Ballet. The appropriation and borrowing Thai classical dance motifs and steps is often adopted into choreographic process of Thai ballet performance, manifestly in *Manohra* ballet. The dancers' body of this ballet style was separated in two parts: upper body and lower body. In order to manifest the Thai story, the choreographers and ballet masters appropriated some kinds of hand movements in Thai classical dance fit into the dancers' upper body. While the lower body parts utilised traditionally classical ballet foot's step to dance. Thai ballet performance-making process exploited an appropriation of Thai dance postures to express as Thai identity through the ballet dance movements. This is because various kinds of hand movements (simplified from the symbolic hand gesture [mudras] of Indian dance), especially "*Chip*" (closed fingers [thumb and index] and opened fingers) and "*Wong*" (curves of arms and hands) were used without the coherence of

transition in Thai dance movement and motion. The curves of arms movement and its alignment in Thai classical dance styles were decreased to use more stretched elbows and arms—liked ballet arm alignment—instead. Only hand gestures of Thai dance were used exaggeratedly in different position with classical ballet dance posture. This appropriation and integration of unique features of Thai dance in classical ballet performance does not give the meaning of contemporary Thai dance. However, it seem to be a hybrid dance form that can assume as Contemporary Thai Dance because the aim of this dance-making creation is principally to represent classical ballet in Thai style. The dance combination with some Thai dance postures was made appropriateness in term of adaptation Thai's characteristics and Thai literature to perform.

Many foreign ballet masters come to teach dance in Thailand in this introductory period of classical ballet, however, playing an important role to drive many ballet dance students to go abroad for learning western dance techniques. There are four pioneers of ballet students in this first generation, which are Khunying Varaporn Pramroj Na Ayutaya, Kanjana Cholvijan (Varaporn's younger sister), H.L Sujira Visitkul and Pornpimon Kuntatham (Boonpeng 21, Srichalakom 15). All of them have their own ballet schools at present. At that period of their dance studying abroad, many styles of modern and contemporary dance were emerged more wildly in the UK. Not only modern and contemporary dance performances but also these dance learning were outstretched in the West. After their graduation and returning to teach ballet in Thailand, teaching of modern and



contemporary dance were gradually expanded in the dance school's course in Thailand.

After this beginning period, classical ballet dance practices have developed in various dimensions. Whether private or public Thai educational institutions such as dance studios, private elementary schools and high schools including public universities have adopted classical ballet practices for teaching and creating their own dance curriculums. Currently there is a diverse of dance styles that Thai has been familiar with. Thai dance, Ballet, Jazz dance, Tap dance, Modern and Contemporary dance including Street Dance styles have been increased and known as the dance genres as much as another Asian country. All regions across Asia, including Thailand have expanded many dance schools. Ballet dance schools in particular were progressively opened by adopted other Western styles in dance and its curriculums for dance teaching among the new generation. The dance school in Thailand seems to be one of a good business. Some of dance school produce competent students, whereas others concentrate on making profit, regardless of proficiency results. However, there are not many professional dance companies for talented dancers to perform in Thailand. Because a lack of professional standard dance companies in Thailand, talented dancers tend to study and find their own encouraging dance career abroad. Many talented Thai

dancers, for instance, Sarawanee Tanatanit <sup>6</sup> , Nutnaree Pipit-Suksun <sup>7</sup> and Teerachai Thobumrung<sup>8</sup> have been continuing their professional dance careers abroad. If this problem is not solved, dance companies in Thailand may run out of qualified dancers. Thailand will not have enough contemporary dance works, and perhaps there will be no works of art that reflect the creativity and the dance development in country.

Likewise, Thai classical dance choreographers during this period were adapted other dance styles to revitalise their own dance form. Focusing on an influence of classical ballet, Mom Phaeo or Mom Achan (as she was called by her pupils) was an influential Thai classical dance master who choreographed many

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<sup>6</sup> Sarawanee Tanatanit is currently dancing with Le Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève in Switzerland since 2008. She was trained ballet at Dance Centre School of Performing Arts, and Varaporn Kanjana Ballet School in Bangkok. At the age of thirteen she joined the national rhythmic gymnastic team of Thailand and earned a gold and silver medal at the annual South East Asian Games (SEA Games), Chiang Mai, Thailand in 1995. Then transferring to train at the Goh Ballet Academy in Vancouver, Canada in 1996. After having won the 2001 Prix de Lausanne, she joined American Ballet Theatre's Studio Company in the same year. In August 2002 she became an apprentice of the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) Company in New York City and officially joined ABT as a member of the corps de ballet since 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Nutnaree Pipit-Suksun is a newest soloist at Ballet San Jose at present. From 1993 to 2000, she was trained at Varaporn and Kanchana Ballet School, Bangkok, Thailand. Then from 2001 to 2004 continued her ballet training at The Royal Ballet School in London, England. In 2004, she received The Most Outstanding Achievement Award in The Royal Ballet School then joined San Francisco Ballet as a youngest soloist, recruited straight from the Royal Ballet School. She performed as a soloist in this company until 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Teerachai Thobumrung is a freelance contemporary dancer in UK. He was trained and graduated in B.A (Hons) in Contemporary Dance at London Contemporary Dance School in 2011. Afterwards he worked as a professional dancer with many internationally renowned contemporary dance companies based in London, for instance, Henri Oguike Dance Company (V4 Tour), Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company (Classic Cut Autumn Tour) and Akram Khan Company (London Olympics Opening Ceremony).

new dance works, which were inspired by Western Ballet. In 1950s, she was invited to help develop the Dance Division of *Khom Silapakhon* by Dhanit Yupho, the director of Khom Silapakhon. Mostly of her contributions were romantic love scenes in *lakhon* such as *Inao*, *Phra Aphaimani*, *Manohra* and *Ngo Pa*. However, her various dance compositions were influenced western ballet and dance such as; Dance of the Nymphs in *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* inspired by *Giselle* and *Les Sylphides*; Dance of horses in *Rothasen* inspired by the Spanish Riding School; Dance of Buffaloes in a *khon* production of *Phali Son Nong* inspired by Spanish bull-fighting dance including the Dance of Mermaids in *Phra Aphaimani*. Under her directions and suggestions, the costume design of these productions some of which exhibited explicitly Western influence such as the fancy costume for the water creatures in *Kraithong*, the *mermaids* costume in *Phra Aphaimani* and the *kinnari* costumes in *Manohra* (Rutnin 178).

*Manohra* in Thai dance repertory demonstrates the small integration of classical ballet steps in Thai dance routine. Master Lamun Yamakup created this dance piece at the Thailand Fine Arts Department's College of Dramatic Arts. The dance was imitated a small degree of ballet dance footsteps into Thai classical dance. The dance routine has slowly walking and stamping on tiptoe including sometimes stretching knees in dance combination. It was adapted some tiny artistic-dancing body in western styles to slightly modify and create new dance movement. This dancing body was blended the selected movements homogenously and harmonically. The appropriateness of dance appropriation is the subtle way to reinvigorate the own dance traditional practices for gradual

progression. Likewise, H.H. Prince Dhannivat Kromamun Bidyalabh Bridhyakorn remarked that Thai dance in the past, indeed, had contemporary processes of changing and adapting dramatics in our country. These were doubtless inspired by “foreign ideals” such as the Indian, the Indonesian and the Cambodian. With the lapse of centuries Thais have evolved their own ideals till they “seem far apart from the original sources of inspiration” (Yupho 1963).

Over the scope of dance artists, Thai theatre practitioners are a key person for expanding and promoting Contemporary Thai Dance as well. Many contemporary theatre creations utilised combination of dance forms between Thai dance and western dance styles as one of theatrical elements. Patravadi Theatre is one of the innovative contemporary theatre companies founded by Patravadi Mejudhon<sup>9</sup>, who is a pioneer in the Thai performing arts scene. At the age of 30, she returned to Thailand and had introduced many new trends in theatre, television and movies, experimenting and integrating techniques of the East and the West in order to create an innovative style of contemporary Thai theatre. Her production, *Khunning Kab Patravadi* (One night with Patravadi) in 1982 showed her talents as a solo singer performance in Broadway style at Thai National Theatre, directed and choreographed by Arthur Faria (an outstanding director of a Broadway

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<sup>9</sup> Patravadi (Kru Lek) Mejudhon is the founder and artistic director of Patravadi Theatre, Thailand. Since an early age she was trained in Thai classical dance and music and then studied performing arts in western styles of theatre and dance with various schools and masters in England, Los Angeles, New York, Canada and Indonesia. In 1973 she was received a winning prestigious film award (Tukkata Thong), as a best actress for her first film, *Maimee Sawan Samrab Khun* (No Heaven for You). She is an award-winning actress, director, playwright and a well-respected mentor.

Musical). It was the first one-woman show ever staged assumed as a first model of “Concert performance” (performing of one solo singer) in Thailand. Its dance routines were Broadway Musical style combined Jazz dance and Thai classical dance accompanying by related styles of music (Sricharakom 39). She established Patravadi Theatre in 1992. Her theatrical works manifest Thai cultural identities and roots were carried on high international accomplishment. The idea of blending between Thai and international (western) art forms is the concept of performance making at Patravadi Theatre. Its theatrical works have a reputation in term of breaking traditions or fusing the traditional Thai elements with theatre presentation techniques, these became her signature theatrical style in contemporary Thai theatre today. Mejudhon advocates many local and international events and festivals. Oftentimes her theatre is a host of festival to promote in both classical and contemporary theatres based on Thai culture, literature, music and dance.

However, the appearance and apprehension of contemporary dance in early period are centred on an appropriation of Thai dance features to create a fusion or hybrid dance forms. It is noticeable that Thai artists focused on how to combine two or more different dance styles in the one dance routine. Whilst most of practitioners at that time did not sufficiently emphasised on the quality of each dance techniques between different styles and forms. Because almost performances in this time highlighted with popular entertainment’s purpose. This kind of uncomplicated combination between Thai and western dance styles was developed and appropriated to use commonly and commercially in a concert performance of Thai popular and Thai country music industry.

### 1.3 Contemporary Dance in Thailand

The introductory period of contemporary dance in Thailand can trace into the dance creations of Thai ballet dancer in the second generation. This period was emerged in following period during 1985–1995 after the Ballet teaching and learning were more acknowledged and widespread in Thailand. Many ballet students who had trained by the first generation of ballet master in Thailand follow their passion and inspiration in the dance profession by studying western dance aboard. Most of them study especially at Royal Ballet School in London. The dance pioneers in this generation including; Vararom Pachimsawat (Founder Dance Centre School and The Company of Performing Artists, Thailand); Professor Naraphong Charassri (Head of dance department at Chulalongkorn University and Founder of Thai Art Movement<sup>10</sup>) and Bancha Suwannanon (Dance scholar and Founder of Mobile Dance Company). The majority of dance performance in this period consistently integrated between western dance styles underlining on classical ballet, and modern dance techniques with Thai classical dance styles. Nonetheless the dance-making process also progressively focused on the themes and concepts of performance rather than adapting Thai dramatic stories as a dance plot or making a narrative dance performance. The concepts mainly were impacted on the philosophy, conventions, traditions and cultures in Thai society.

Vararom Pachimsawat graduated from London's Royal Ballet School in 1980. She was the Thai ballet dancer who joined and performed with international

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<sup>10</sup> Thai Art Movement (TAM-a nickname of the founder) was established by Professor Naraphong Charassri (PhD.), one pioneer of Thai dance scene.

dance companies in the UK. After years of experience as a professional dancer, in 1985 she returned to Thailand and founded Dance Centre School of Performing Arts. The school provides various dance classes and techniques such as classical ballet, jazz, contemporary, creative dance, hip-hop, street dance, Latin, ballroom and rhythmic gymnastics (Pachimsawat, Dance-centre). Many of her dance projects have affiliated with international cultural organisations and bursaries such as gaining the annual supports and partnership with UNESCO-Ashberg Fund and Asia Link. She had the idea to provide these the project for create international opportunities to encourage ambitious dancers of next generation become professional. Through these diverse platforms such as dancing and performing with the international choreographers and masters, students can learn the life and guideline of a professional dancer towards the right path. Later, in 1996 she and some dance instructors also co-found the Company of Performing Artists (CPA), Thailand and the Friends of the Arts Foundation. These organisation hosts the annual International Dance Festival among other events. Pachimsawat, herself, also performed the company production during earliest stage. Afterward she reduced the role as a dancer to be a director, choreographer and producer of international dance festival in Thailand. In 2004 the last performance as a guest dancer she collaborated dance works with the Brazilian dancers Prof. Marcia Haydée and Ismael Ivo in contemporary dance adaptation of Shakespeare's classic play, *The Tempest*. Pichet Klunchun who is the case study of this thesis, performed as Ariel in this work. Working with the CPA in many dance projects is the important step and experience for Klunchun.

Naraphong Charassri, a dance artist and choreographer is a pioneer of modern dance and remains an influential figure in contemporary dance-art circles in Thailand (Miettinen cite in Panorak 2). In 1978, He graduated B.A. in Architecture, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. After his graduation he went abroad to study the Teacher's course and Dancer's course at the Royal Ballet School, London, United Kingdom during 1978-1981. In London he worked as a full-time dancer and choreographer of Spiral Dance Company (1980-1984), Liverpool and moved to work with Extemporary Dance Theatre in London (1984-1987). He had a lot of dance works collaborating and sharing with many of most important European and American pioneers of "New Dance" during 1980-1996, for instance, Steve Paxton (The Father of body Contract Improvisation Method), David Gordon (Director of the Pick Up Dance Company, New York), Dan Wagner (A former Director of London contemporary Dance Company in London and Dans Wagner Dance Company, New York), Richard Alston (Director of the Rambert Dance Theatre) and so forth. In 1989 Charassri founded The Art Movement (Tam) Dance Theatre. The first company performance entitled *Parfum* expresses the theme of human life and manifests fixed roles of Thai woman as a mother, a wife and a worker in Thai culture (Srichalakom 87).

In 1992, Charassri became to be the first instructor at department of western dance (Ballet), Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, which was established in 1987. As a consequence of his influence in dance area, the "conceptual" dance style has grown constantly in many dance educational institutions. His choreography *Narai Avatara* (1995, 2002) is one famous dance performance. The concept and dance



movement was inspired by aesthetics of Ramakein, the poetic masterpiece of King Rama I and Thai mural painting inside the Temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Khew), Thailand. The dance expression was defined as contemporary Thai dance, however, remained the process of exploiting and integrating signature movements of two classical dance form between Thai dance and Western dance (classical ballet). Tovititwong (122) asserts this Contemporary Thai Dance is an integration of Thai dance and western dance style such as utilising flexing the front foot as in Thai dance posture while pointing the back foot as in western ballet dance style or imitating ballet's arabesque posture showing the joyfulness and happiness of the woman characters. In addition, the choreographer merge balletic movement and its tradition into the dance-making process such as the balletic dance pattern and lifting posture of Pas de deux. The hybridisation between two dance forms has been analysed as a contemporary Thai dance. However only analysis and identification of different artistic dance forms centring on its specific movement such as flexing is Thai dance and pointing is ballet step might be limited the perception of Contemporary Thai Dance in Thailand.

The term of Modern Dance (Contemporary Thai dance) was written and separated from ballet and Jazz performance apparently in the programme of *The Dance Festival East-West-Classical-Modern-Contemporary-Jazz*. This festival was produced by Prof. Dr. Mattani Runin, hosted the Department of Drama, Thammasat University On 22-23 February in 1987. She stated in the programme that

It is the first time in history of teaching and learning Thai and Western Dance in our modern period. There are dance artists from many institutions and the creative dance and concept in diverse forms were congregated in this dance festival... It is a pride of Thai people in order to preserve, inherit and create arts and culture of the nation by combining Western, Asia and Thai concepts harmoniously [my translation] (Dance, 22-23).

It is noticeable that in the programme was categorised the dance forms obviously which are Ballet, Modern Dance, Thai traditional dance. The performance in this festival some of which can be seen the group of contemporary dance pioneers at that time. They combined the Thai dance motif, ideology and philosophy of Thais with western contemporary dance skills for exposing various kinds of dance presentation (Sricharakom 55).

Later period during 1995-2000, Contemporary Thai Dance had been more materialised regarding to theory of choreography and contemporary dance technique as comparable as the concept of contemporary dance in global (western) understanding. This is because many dance performers and choreographers in this age initially adopted the western contemporary dance techniques and selected the process of contemporary dance making to blend in their choreographic process. Whilst the former dance artists and generations that aforementioned above centred and based on the classical ballet forms and traditions, resembling as just the new hybrid dance forms or borrowing the exoticism of Thai dance gestures. Therefore, only the hybrid process between

regional and classical dance forms like this does not sufficiently argue as a contemporary dance. The majority of dance artists in this period were the dance graduates from Thai reputable universities. Most of them performed and participated in dance performance or dance project of earlier dance artists. The principle choreographers are composed of: Manop Meejamras (Principle dancer at Patravadi Theatre), Peeramon Chomdhawat (Founder Arporn-ngam Dance Theatre) and Pichet Khunchun (Founder Pichet Khunchun Dance Company).

Manop Meejamras joined at Patravadi Theatre in 1987. He is amongst the first generation of performers to receive a grant from the theatre to study various forms of performing arts. He trained internationally in Ballet, Modern Dance, Butoh, Acrobatics, Javanese and Balinese dance arts in many countries such as Britain, France, Canada, Japan and Indonesia. He also studied with two well-known *khon* Masters. One is a *khon* master and national artist, Master Rakop Pothivech expertise in demon *khon* character. Another one is Master Theerayuth Yongsri expertising in male *khon* character. Manop Meejamras is a choreographer, director and actor, mostly performed his theatre work at Patravadi Theatre. He was awarded the excellent theatre artist from Patravadi theatre in 1997. He has participated in numerous international workshops, including a workshop on Thai performing arts in Berlin (Germany), and a lecture and workshop series held in Tallinn (Estonia), Hong Kong, and Singapore under the title “The difference between Thai and Western performing artists”. His performance also performed on international stage including contemporary *khon* performance, *King Kerd* (Lord Stressful) (1997) staged in Malaysia, Singapore, Germany, Italy and France. With

Thai and international recognitions, in 2005, the Office of Contemporary Arts, the Ministry of Culture awarded Meejamras the second Silapathon winning award as an artist who created contemporary performance art.

Almost of his choreography and theatrical works followed the creative concept of Patravadi theatre by practical using Thai dances (both Thai classical and folk dance) with modern theatrical components and new media. It purposed to make a compact display and energetic and enjoyable atmosphere for the modern audience. In the first stage, he regularly contributed his works for theatrical and drama display of Patravadi theatre rather than pure dance performance. Later he created his own choreography such as *Kang kao Klin Kluay* (Bats Eat Bananas) (1996), *Lao Duang Dean* (By the Light of the Full Moon) (1997), *King Kerd* (Lord stressful) (1997), *Naga Phraya* (Lord Naga) (1999), *Tid Din* (Down to Earth) (1999) and *Phleng Cha Phleng Raw* (slow and fast song) (2001) (Sricharakom 292). His numerous dance creations were adapted and added various faster rhythm, rapid steps in diverse dynamics into Thai dance movements. In term of contemporary dance, he also integrated Thai dance forms with contemporary dance techniques styles that he had learned. His contemporary choreography for instance merging the martial folk dance in Northern part of Thailand with the Western Contemporary techniques such as Release, Cause & Effect including Contact Improvisation (Sricharakom 292).

Peeramon Chomdhavat is one of prominent dance artist and and costume designs in Thailand. He graduated in B.F.A. in Dance (Ballet), Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. During his studying in university, he was

trained ballet by William Morgan and frequently performed with Bangkok Ballet Association until present such as a male principle dancer in *Sri-praj, A Midsummer Night's Dream, La Bayadere*. In 1992, he joined with Le Jeune Ballet De France as a professional dancer and performed touring in France, other European countries, Africa and Asia. Following in his dance career by moving to perform with the Red Notes Dance Company and L'Opera De Paris in the opera production *Les Cont d' Hoffman*. Chomdhawat started his choreographic work in contemporary dance after returning to Thailand. Through distinctive features as well as the root of Thai culture in his choreography received international attention where he was invited to perform in many events, including the Lucifer Project in Japan, Hong Kong Art Festival, Perth Festival of Art, as well as Theater der Welt 1999 in Berlin (Arporn-Ngam, *Biography*). He choreographed his solo dance performance for instance *Rum Mae bot* (1994,1995) and *Homage* (1997). These dance repertoires were employed contract-release techniques, improvised movement, fall and recovery, which are characteristic of western contemporary dance style. Meantime some of his choreography intends to adapt the basic of Thai classical dance routine (Mae Bot) in order to invent new experimental dance postures.

Chomdhawat was the special dance lecture and practitioner in many dance programs in university. Apart from his talents in ballet and contemporary dance, he was interested in costume design and research works on dance costumes especially Thai classical dance. From his expertise and work experience in the performing arts field for over 20 years, he found that there was still a lack necessary research and development in this area. Therefore, he set up his

company Arporn-Ngam Dance Theatre (Arporn-Ngam means beautiful costumes) to build a body of knowledge in the field of dance and costume designs for Thai classical theatre in particular. His costumes in all areas whether traditional Thai, western or contemporary designs has been consistently recognised particularly in its elaborate in details and outstanding quality. He has been currently entrusted to be a member of the organising committee as well as the assistant director and adviser to the costume department of *khon* performance under The Support Foundation of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's royal patronage.

Ultimately Pichet Khunchun, who is the principal subject of this dissertation, frequently utilises his strong traditional dance craft— *khon* dancing body—in order to collaborate with other artists. He was a performer of The Company of Performing Artist, Thailand, founded in 1997 by Vararom Pachimsawat. As a principle dancer, he performed *Kakee* (1997), *Manohra* (1997) and *Ramayana* (1998) in the early period of this company. These company performances were set the intercultural practices into performance making process depending on diverse dance and performance backgrounds of performer. Almost female performers and characters in these productions based on Classical Ballet and Modern Dance techniques while Khunchun adapted and exploited strongly his own *khon* classical dance techniques. The performers encounter and enact with each other by deploying and demonstrating contemporary dance techniques such as contact improvisation, body and mind centring, release techniques and so forth. In this period of time the dance artists had initially searched for finding the suitable ways to integrate various dance styles into performance. It is not only experimenting and exploring

combination of Thai classical dance and classical ballet, but also *khon* Thai masked dance, folk dance, martial dance, and other local dance forms and its traditions have been investigated through contemporary dance-making process.

Since the arrival of new millennium many contemporary dance classes, workshops and performances both of local and international artists are consistently and increasingly flourished in Thailand. It is noteworthy that the changes of theatrical dance practices of Thai artists are even more created in especially cross-cultural aspects in choreographic process. This is a consequence of more opportunities that Thai dance practitioners can participate and practise new theatrical dance techniques and other art forms, thus, these exchange events between Thai and international artists lead them to collaborate the appearance of hybrid dance forms have expressed explicitly. Over the past few decades, there are contemporary dance performances emerged more than the previous period. There are many ambiguities and questions come along with the process of contemporary performance. Both in the past and present the adaptation, exoticisation, appropriation, exploitation and borrowing of foreign theatrical elements and traditions into their own (Thai) performance-making process are extensively disputed and questioned. The new different paradigm of creative and critical performance making in choreographic process has challenged various aspects of Thai classical dance and its traditions nowadays. Thai contemporary dance artists, however, do not express themselves merely through contemporary dance techniques as identically as western dance understanding. They are also draw on more complicated elements for instance concepts of Thai identity, Thai

dance techniques and traditions as well as social and political issues to produce their own contemporary performance. Thus it is unsurprising that they actually resort to use their own dance proficiencies and familiar movements—Thai traditional, classical and folk dance forms— to explore the revitalisation of their dance tradition in their own contemporary way.

Pichet Klunchun is a key person in this dissertation. His dance company Pichet Klunchun Dance Company, is an exemplary model of professional dance company in Thailand. Klunchun claimed his company is the first individual artistic dance company in the country at present which employ the Thai traditional dancers as a full-time employment. He has choreographed and created different performance styles and forms including Thai Traditional Dance, Modern Thai dance, Contemporary performance even Conceptual and Installation Performance. Whatever these genres are shaped and named to create the company productions, the core dance practices and techniques based on Thai dance— *khon*, Thai masked dance in particular-- with contemporary sensibility. In Jos Schuring's interview Klunchun expresses that

Cultural diversity is my work. I cannot imagine life without it. What I am doing with my own PK Lifework dance company is to link classical Thai dance from the *khon* culture – a traditional type of Thai dance – with contemporary dance. We are reaching a highly varied audience in Bangkok. For the traditional Thai, my performances are sometimes difficult to understand. The youth and foreigners, however, admire my work.



Klunchun attempts to generate his own dance theories and techniques, investigating comprehensively in the root of Thai Dance— *khon* dancing body in particular. Through his perspective, the company repertory was analysed in this dissertation—*Black and White, khon* performance—was intended to explore the identity of *khon* dancing body especially in the fighting movements in the battle scenes of *Ramakein*. In order to experiment the alternative way of expression contemporary *khon* company's dance practices. The production of *Black and White* is an acclaimed dance form of contemporary (modern) version of Thai *khon* dance. The outstanding integration between *khon* Thai masked dance forms and contemporary movements in the production was renowned to be accepted and perceived as a new *khon* dancing body through international stages and world dance criticism nowadays.

*Khon* is such a valuable part of Thai culture and representative of Thai traditional theatre today. It is performed only with the presentation of the Thai national epic *Ramakien* (The Glory of Rama), the Thai version of arguably the most important piece of literature of India and mainland Southeast Asia. Although the *Ramakien* was adapted from the *Ramayana*, the Indian epic, to Thai culture and traditions, it was not derived from the *Ramayana* of Valmiki. This story came from Indonesian versions, which probably originated from many sources or stemmed from the pre-classical Indian version during the Buddhist period. Afterwards, Valmiki's version was translated and adapted into the Thai *Ramakien* by King Vajiravudh. During the ancient time, the aristocracy and bureaucracy of Siam learned and studied the *Ramakien* to promulgate it to the general public. After that

the privilege class introduced this story to the commoners through educational system. A classic version of *Ramakien* from the high classes played an important role in the culture and religion of Thai kingdom and dominated the central Thailand. As can be seen, the name of *Rama* from *Ramakien* was used as Thai practice of giving name to the king in the current dynasty. Even though the name of the roads, the bridges and also the folk or local stories were related with this national literature such as the Rama IX bridge and the Rama IX road. It is clear that *Ramakien* influences the way in which the various different cultural tribes under the Siam kingdom were gathered into one nation that shared the same social values and cultural products. Wongthes assumed the use of *Ramakien* is a political strategy that “King of Siam used to govern the nation in order to secure the power and position of the nation” (234-239).

The long history, the development and structures of *khon* performance are provided the background and cultural root in order to understand and analyse the new *khon* dance creation. Through the contemporary spotlight elements of *khon* performance was adapted and reinterpreted by productions of Pichet Khunchun Dance Company. These circumstances, at least, exhibit cultural exchanges between Thai *khon* dance and contemporary performance.

All of these acculturations and cultural appropriations across diverse boundaries can also be interpreted and analysed. By mentioned providing an overview of contemporary dance performance in Thailand, the encounters, exchanges, creations between these platforms can investigated through the contemporary works of Pichet Klunchun Dance Company. It demonstrates how

dance artists revitalises and modified their own dance craft to lively exist in Thai contemporary society and its contexts. Dance like other art forms and culture which need to be dynamic rather than and unchanged. It should develop according to contemporary life and changes in society. By the way of investigating *khon* and its trends though historical documentation of Thai theatrical cultures can be a productive component to shape and analyse the current phenomena of Pichet Klunchun Dance Company. This thesis will demonstrate and reflect how the Thai artists challenge themselves with their crafts. *Black and White*, the company performances as the case study is a ground-breaking dance work that manifest how Klunchun modernise *khon* dancing and create the new history of Thai dance through global contemporary dance circles.

## Chapter 2

### Biography and Dance Works of Pichet Klunchun

Pichet Klunchun is one of the most acclaimed Thai dance artists to identify as a *khon* dancer. His solo performances as well as his choreographic works have been internationally renowned, particularly his contemporary performance based on Thai classical dance. He was the 2006 recipient of the 3rd Silpathon Award<sup>11</sup> in Performing Arts from the Office of Contemporary Arts and Culture, Thailand. In addition his collaborative work called *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* with Jerome Bel<sup>12</sup> was awarded the 'Routes' ECF Princess Margriet Award for Cultural Diversity<sup>13</sup> from the European Cultural Foundation in 2008. Recently in 2012 he was awarded a Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture. This is due to his works demonstrating an innovative method for understanding cultural diversity in practice (Chenal et al. 31). All these national

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<sup>11</sup> The Silpathon Award is an award for Thai contemporary artist between the ages of 30 and 50 who have created continuously contemporary art works. The purpose of this award is to support and promote Thai contemporary artists. Five fields are represented, namely Visual Arts, Literature, Music, Film and Performing Arts. The first awards were given in 2004 (The Office of Contemporary Arts 12-15).

<sup>2</sup> Jérôme Bel was trained at The Centre National de Dance Contemporaine of Angers (France) in 1984-1985. After his graduation, he worked for many choreographers in France and Italy until 1991. In 2005, he was invited to work with Pichet Klunchun by the Singaporean curator, Tang Fu Kuen, resulting in *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2005), which premiered in Bangkok. In the same year he received a Bessie Award for the production *The Show Must Go On* in New York (Chenal et al. 32).

<sup>13</sup> The Routes ECF Princess Margriet Award for Cultural Diversity commends and encourages exceptional contributions of artistic practitioners and cultural figures who contribute to an affirmative understanding of cultural diversity. The award acknowledges not only the quality of the laureate's artistic or critical work, but also its broader significance to contemporary European society (Chenal et al. 12).

and world-class awards confirm that Klunchun is an international dancer-choreographer who currently has great influence in world dance circuits.



Figure 2.1 Pichet Klunchun in *Black and White* (2011) wearing Thai modern *khon*-costume

## 2.1 The Birth and Childhood of Pichet Klunchun

Pichet Klunchun, the son of Mr.Chong and Mrs.Pissamai Klunchun, was born on 20 February 1971 in Bangpakong District, Chachoengsao Province, Thailand. He grew up as a son of a fisherman amidst the countryside. He attended primary school in Samkao Wittayakan, Chachoengsao Province and later went to secondary school at Bangpakok Pittayakom School in Bangkok. However, living in the city had a bad influence on him and he often ran away from home. It wasn't

until accidentally meeting Chaiyot Khummanee<sup>14</sup>, a *khon* master that he was introduced to the world of Thai dance.

In high school, Klunchun was interested in the art of Thai dance and joined the Thai Music Club at the Mathayom 4 level (equivalent to the UK school year 10). Upon joining the club, he practised Thai classical music, playing the Thai alto bamboo xylophone (*ranad aek*). He was taught intensively in this musical instrument for a year. At the end of semester, the school organised a New Year festival celebration, part of which would require a Thai dance performance for the opening ceremony. The Thai Music Club performed *Rum Klong Yao*<sup>15</sup> (A Long-Drum Dance). At that time, there was only one trainee female teacher from The College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok (Wittayalai Nattasin) to train Thai dance at the school. However, she was not keen on the male dance pattern of *Rum Klong Yao* but fortunately she knew master Chaiyot Khummanee. Accordingly, she invited him to train the dancers for this dance performance. Consequently, Klunchun met his master by chance. During three weeks of training and rehearsal before the day

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<sup>14</sup> Chaiyot Khummanee is Klunchun's *khon*-master. He was trained as a demon *khon*-character with *khon* masters Aram Intaranut, Yad Changthong (at The National Artist of Thailand for *khon* performance in 1989) and Luang Wilas Wong Ngam at The College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok. After graduating, he became the *khon* master in this college. In addition, he taught and directed various performances of the college and The Fine Arts Department, Thailand.

<sup>15</sup> Ram Klong-Yao (The Long-Drum Dance) is performed on all festivals, for instance making merit at home, monk ordination ceremonies, weddings etc. The performers can be male or female who dance for enjoyment and relaxation, without any deeper meaning. The dance can dance with bare hands or with cymbals, and without a preconceived plan. The Long Drum is played throughout the dancing, to provide pulse and excitement, both while stationary or during a celebratory procession. Thus, Thai performing arts of the Central Region relate intimately with communal life centred on agricultural work and water, in the context of a socio-economic setting of peace and natural resource abundance.

of performance, Klunchun learned dance practice from the master. Master Khummanee saw his charisma and patience throughout the training. The master changed Klunchun's role from a long-drum player standing behind the dancer-players, to a cymbals (*charb*) player. This role had a short improvised solo dance with cymbals as an opening scene of *Rum Klong Yao*. This was a turning point that converted him from musician to dancer (Klunchun, Feb 2013). The trainee teacher appreciated his performance and was impressed with his body structure and his potential to train in *khon* dance. She suggested that he ask the master to learn *khon* dance. In the last day of rehearsing the *Rum Klong Yao* dance, Pichet thus begged to be Kummanee' dance student. At that time, he said "I did not know the reason why or what inspired me to beg master Khummanee like that however it was the way to becoming a patient artist" (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

As the result of his courage, the master allowed him to study *khon* dance at his house every weekend. Klunchun started to practise *khon* and Thai classical dance at the age of sixteen. He had learned *khon* dance through an old-fashioned style of learning. The master trained him in private class, face to face, in the traditional style of dance teaching. This emphasises repetition of rigorous dance practices continually. He would exercise in *khon* all day long every weekend at his master's house. During the summer school vacation in April, he practised the same dance vocabularies and patterns again and again, every day. Often he stayed overnight at the master's house, in return, he did everything that might be expected of a member of his master's family. He took Kummanee's mother to see a doctor and when she died Klunchun and he joined a monastery to pay respect to her life

(Phuengpo 22). He continued to do this habitually until his master passed away in 2002, and even after master Kummanee departed, he still continued to take care of his master's wife by bringing her to see a doctor until she died of cancer (Damrhung 2013).



Figure 2.2 Pichet Klunchun performed as Tosakanth in the opening show of sport event at Bangpakok Pittayakom School in 1990



## 2.2 The Khon Master

Master Chaiyot Khummanee was an expert in *khon*'s demon character. He was trained in *khon* dance with master Aram Intaranut,<sup>16</sup> a royal *khon* performer since the reign of King Vajiravudh (King Rama VI). After this period the Royal Khon Department (Khom Mahorasop) came under the direction of the new Thai government. It was reformed and renamed The Office of Performing Arts, The Fine Arts Department (Khom Silapakorn). This organisation later established the dance and music school named the College of Dramatic Arts (Wittayalai Nattasin). Master Khummanee was trained in this school. He was a classmate and colleague with master Rakob Bhodives<sup>17</sup>, the national artist in the *khon*-demon character at present. After his graduation he was employed as the *khon* dance teacher at the College. Khunchun met his master Khummanee six years before his official retirement.

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<sup>16</sup> Master Aram Intaranut was born on 12 February 1913. He was trained *khon* dance (male character) with his father Luang Wilas Wong Ngam (Lham Intaranut). Later his father brought him adhered to master Sa-nga Sasivanija and master Thom Bhodives for training *khon*-demon character. Afterward Phraya Natthakanurak (Thongdee Suwanparot) adopted him (Aram) to practise demon character in his school. Until in 1930, Aram Intaranut was a bureaucratic artist of Thai Music and Royal Khon Department (Khom Piphat and Khon Laung). He worked as a *khon* artist and onward to promote as the principal artist (Silapin Aek) in which the top rank of *khon* artist at that time. After his retirement, the government continually employed him as the expert of *khon*-demon character to teach the dance students of the College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok.

<sup>17</sup> Master Rakob Bhodives was appointed a national artist of Thailand in *khon* performance in 2004. He is the son of master Thom Bhodives, a royal *khon* artist (demon character) in the reign of the king Rama VI, His mother, Choung Bhodives, was a performer in an itinerant show. Bhodives studied *khon* at the College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok. Later he became a bureaucratic artist at the Fine Arts Department, Thailand until retirement age. Presently at the age of 78 years old, he continues to teach *khon* as a expert at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute (Higher Education of the College of Dramatic Arts, Thailand).

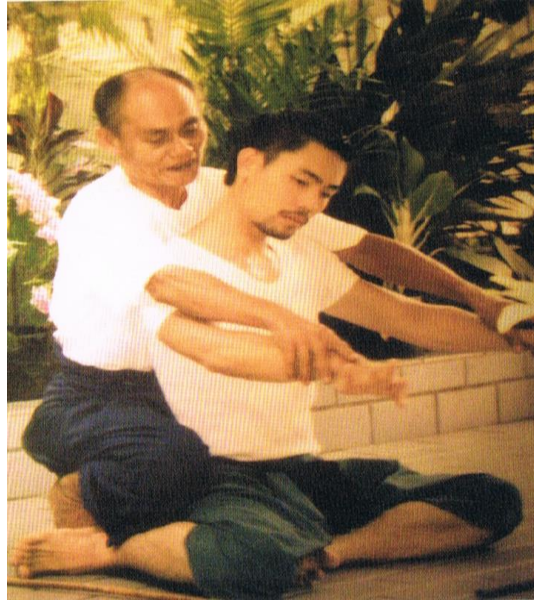


Figure 2.3 Master Chaiyot Khummanee taught *khon* for Pichet Klunchun

Klunchun said the dance teaching and learning system in the college were boring to his master (Klunchun, Feb 2013). As a senior teacher in Thai classical dance teaching, there are younger dance teachers who do the actual teaching in the position of teaching assistants. Therefore, the responsibility of a dance master is only conducting and keeping an eye on dance teaching in the school. This teaching style has long been the organisational culture and norm of Thai dance training in the school. Hence the original style of learning Thai dance has been fixed. Thai dance students also focus on remembering and mimicking the dance patterns and forms rather than understanding precisely the quality of Thai dance movement. In addition, the students who come to practice in the school's curriculum are not particularly interested in the individual teaching style of master Khummanee, and are inattentive to its format, dancing lessons and coaching. The result of this was that the master had little passion for dance teaching at the school.

An individualised training of Khummanee and his dance style was overlooked from the national dance school. Likewise learning classical dance forms of Bharatanatyam and Kathak in India and Britain, Prickett (37) asserts that an individualised training offering a unique and intensive interaction between the *guru* (teacher) and *shishya* (student) is ignored at the state-supported institutions.

In an interview, Klunchun called his master *Por-Khru* (Father-Teacher). This resonant term represents a profound student-master relationship indicating his faith, his reverence and respect to his master. In Thailand, a student of the performing arts regularly calls his/her teacher *Khru*, which means ‘teacher’ in Thai. There is a Thai ritual called the *Wai Khru* ceremony at which students can pay their respects to their teachers or masters. This is a significant Thai rite, which has long been a tradition of many traditional art forms such as *Muay Thai*, *Krabi Krabong* and Thai classical dance as well as classical music. The students will regularly perform this ritual at their initiation of learning. In addition, traditionally before performances, the performers will display and pay their homages to their masters and the deities who created and patronise their arts. At the present the primary and secondary level of many government-run schools in Thailand have adopted this ceremony. It is usually arranged near the start of the school year in order to formalise student-teacher relationships and manifest the student’s gratitude. Although the word *Khru* is very meaningful for him, Klunchun also argues that student-teacher relationships and traditional style of learning can be harmful to a learner. He comments upon Thai dance teaching by saying in a book of “*Tua Gu Khong Gu*” that:

The mechanism (student-teacher relationship) is a very good mechanism. But at the same time this mechanism attacks itself. I am very pleased with the word “Khru Kab Sith” (teacher and student/master and disciple). We (the student) love our teachers as our second parents. But we did not dare to ask any questions in what we are suspected. Therefore, it hurt us at the same time. It makes us afraid to get away from what someone (teacher) told us, because we believe in that person so much. The following problem is why Thai children do not think and rarely dare to express anything in other directions [my translation] (Taepanich 64).

Klunchun states that he was a typical Thai student who always rigorously followed and did everything that his master told him to do. He did not dare to ask his master any questions. After 12 years of training when he had grown up and learnt something, he began to converse with his master gradually. His curiosity led him to question his teacher. Why does he need to do this? What is its origin? Afterwards he began to ask and find the answers, he understood the rationality of Thai dance practices progressively.

The aim and method of teaching Thai dance in the past was not as identical as the current educational system. In Thailand the dance teaching system nowadays follows the Ministry of Education curriculums. It focuses on assessing and grading through the quantity of subject credits and examinations. Comparing

dance learning and acquisition of choreographies of *Na Phat*<sup>18</sup> between the past and present are also different. His master always told him that it was very difficult in the past to acquire and learn these higher-level choreographies. At that time master Intaranut (Khummanee's teacher) wanted to build his new house, so he ordered his students including Khummanee to dig holes for the house poles. If the students could dig holes to the best of their ability, the master would give the choreography depending on the student's force and their competency. The students regularly served and helped their master in order to gain dance knowledge. It is noticeable that an acquisition of dance artistic and aesthetic is not easier in particular the high level of choreographies as compared to dance teaching in the school's curriculum nowadays. In previous times it depended on the masters' belief and trust. The master would give these as an act of loving-kindness and affection. Teaching and learning dance through hardship, living up to the masters' expectations, in which there is a close relationship between teacher and student. Anyone who intends to learn Thai dance to be a professional artist should dedicate themselves to the art and making the dance a part of their life.

In contrast, indeed all current dance students can learn all choreographies of *Na Phat* as they are fully contained in the school's curriculums. Thai dance curriculums specify clearly what kinds of dance and choreographies students have to learn in each year and class in order to graduate the coursework. *Na Phat* is

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<sup>18</sup> *Na Phat* is one kind of Thai classical song to express the action and movement of characters (Pojjananukrom 556). Sometimes it uses to respectfully invite gods, goddesses, hermits and masters who pass away to attend "Wai Khru ceremony" (Kosinanon 9).

one a dance course in the university dance curriculum. Students must have completed this before they can graduate with a bachelor's degree in Thai Dance. Klunchun disagrees with this kind of dance teaching in university. According to current dance educational systems did not provide sufficient time for practicing. He asserts that in fact:

*Na Phat* is a personal property of each master. If they do not really love and trust their students, they are not able to teach prematurely. As long as it depends on conditions that pupils must have enough dance capability and mature behaviour to learn (Klunchun, 2013).

Due to the reasons that if the master teaches these dances to people who are not ready or skilled enough to complete all artistic of dance standards, it will be useless and a waste of time. In addition, if those people then use the choreographies to teach the next generation of pupils, pupils will inherit these dances in a wrong way. Hence looking back on current dance education that students should complete the dance college at the age of 16-18 years who did not ready to learn *Na Phat*. However, it is not depended on adulthood, but effectiveness and quality of dance training and practicing instead. The Thai dance teacher both in schools and the universities should train more than twenty choreographies hurriedly during one semester. In fact, students need more time in order to refine “aesthetic of dance” and their dancing skills. These are all factors, which make each person not equal in their abilities to learn. Klunchun insists that accelerated time in dance education and intensive dance course cannot produce professional and effective dance performers for the country. He truly believes in learning through personal

development by using the traditional style of teaching. Because it emphasises on “using the screening of human nature. Whoever can fight and endure themselves throughout rigorous dance training, those are able to continue and maintain the aesthetic and integrity of Thai dance art at its best” (Klunchun, 2013).

Today the choreographies of *Na Phat* are contained in Thai dance curriculums, which allows everyone to be able to learn these things equally. If looking at the equality in a democratic society, it seems that this dance education system allows most people to learn Thai dance easily and equally. When dance students pass each class level, they will be able to continue dancing and learning in higher and more complicated choreographies respectively. Making all people equal and spreading dance knowledge equally, thoroughly demonstrates the progression of the current Thai dance education. However, in practice only the process of learning dance that students imitate the choreographies in less of time and highlighting mainly for dance examination, it may be a lack of artistic dance and its presentation. The student cannot understand “profoundness” and “style” to present the dance performance. Because in fact they have to complete the course of *Rum Na Phat* (*Na Phat* Dance) in which has more than twenty songs and choreographies in three months or one semester. As compared to Klunchun, in three months of his private dance class with his master sometimes he failed to start the new choreography. He merely did simply basic dance practices. The master did not continue any choreography, if the student cannot dance perfectly in the basic dance posture. As like as his compares the dance learning with the metaphor as a tree. “If the tree is not strong or fruit is not ripe enough, it is

completely useless to collected” (Klunchun, Feb 2013). His master Khummanee believed the body structure adjustment of *khon* dancer is the first thing to accomplish. If the dancers prepare themselves and understand whole basic of *khon* dance movement, they can be used to further and develop the dance creation and adaptation. In this manner, his teachers did not care about how many choreographies or a wide variety of dance procedures that he can do, but the master interested in the quality of the dance and its process that he gained. He was trained and practiced the basic dance movement for a long time without learning any choreography. Every *khon* dancer needs to undertake the rigorous physical training and basic of *khon* dance practices, for instance, *Tong Sa ew* (Knocking the waist) and *Ten Sao* (Steps at the pole). He has practised these until now. Afterwards he trained *Mae Ta* (mother of *khon* postures) and various styles of hand movements. These skills were prepared firmly the fundamental of *khon* dance vocabularies to him before doing something else. Whenever the master would like to give any choreography, the beauty of the dance will come along with its quality through the body of dancer automatically. For him “this opportunity is the good fortune in my life to learn in this way” (Klunchun, Feb 2013). While dance training in Thai educational system is limited in time allocation. Even if in the educational system there are practical preparations in several years from primary to secondary school, it still cannot make a perfect dance performance. “We are talking about the art, the art of practice. For this kind of art forms if you practice and spend the time as much as you can, you will be stronger, more complete and more beautiful in the dance” (Klunchun, Feb 2013). The masters in the previous



times usually practised and danced throughout their life. It can be seen that at present we cannot find an artist of new generation who has talented and skilled comparable to the former artists. Because of the current study has not concentrated on the qualities of dance training but focusing on the quantity of dance students in curriculum and the process of gradation instead.

### **2.3 Thai Dance and His university life**

In 1991, Klunchun can pass the college entrance by using his dance talent in order to study in Thai Dance major at The Department of Dance, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. The criteria of admission tests were consisted of General Subject Test and Aptitude Test in Dance. The aptitude test was separated in two sections; a written exam on the history and theory of Thai dance and a Thai dance practice exam. Focusing on practical test, it was divided in the four-parts. The first one was basic Thai classical dance routines included *Phleng Cha* (slow song), *Phleng Raw* (fast song), *Mae Bot Yai* and basic choreographies of male human character such as *Rabam Daowadung*, *Rabam Krida Piniharn* and so forth. Although Klunchun attempted to remember and practice these dance patterns and choreographies before the exam, but he did not pass this test at the first time of dancing. Because of these are basic routines for male and female characters thus he did not dance accurately and proficiently. Ultimately Klunchun asked the committee by saying that “Because I was trained in demon *khon*-character, Could I demonstrate the basic dance routine of demon character for testing?” (Klunchun, Feb 2013). At that moment the committee

allowed him to perform. One of the committee at the time was master Suwannee Chalanukroh<sup>19</sup> who is a national artist for Thai classical dance. It can be assumed that the committees were very impressed Klunchun performance. Because his style of *khon* dancing derived from his master Kummanee is very exceptional. It is quite different in comparison with the *khon* of Fine Art Department and The College of Dramatic Arts, Thailand (Dumrhung, *Personal* 2013).

Secondly, the dance examiners must to show their unique dance capabilities by performing solo performance. Klunchun chose the choreography of “Tosakanth courts the disguised Benjakai”<sup>20</sup> in which he can dance proficiently. For the third dance test, the testers had to perform folk dances by drawing the name of four primary regions of Thailand: North, Centre, Northeast and South which one they will perform. Khunchun drew the North which he has never experience in any northern style of folk dances. Thus he decided to negotiate with

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<sup>19</sup> Master Suwannee Chalanukroh is a Thai national artist in Lakorn Ram performance. She was trained female character at Royal Lakhon Troupe under the direction of Phraya Natthakanurak. After a political change in 1932, the Royal Lakhon Troupe was abolished. Until the College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok was established in 1994, she went back to learn Thai classical dance at this college. However, she switched to train male character instead cause her shape was taller. After her graduation at Matthyom 6 level, in 1943 she was employed to be an artist at The Fine Art Department, Thailand.

<sup>20</sup> *Tosakanth courts the disguised Benjakai* is a part of *khon* episode of *The Floating Lady (Nang Loi)*. Tosakanth (Ravana) command Benjakai, his own niece, to assume the disguise of Sida (Sita, Rama's wife) in order to fool Phra Ram (Rama) and Phra Lak (Laksmana) by floating the apparently dead body of Sida upstream. Benjakai leaves for a moment and transforms to be Sida's double. Through his enchantment Tosakanth cannot control himself, and starts to make advances to the disguised Sida. Benyakai turn into her own self soon after, the ashamed Tosakanth apologises for his behaviour to his niece. This episode was attribute to the King Rama II. It is quintessentially Thai and does not belong to the original Indian Ramayana.

the committees that they cannot dance the northern one but he prepared Ram Klong-Yao, folk dance of the Centre Region to perform instead. The last practical dance test was *Ram Tee Bot*. The students received a short play script for interpreting and performing by using the Thai classical dance vocabularies. In this section, he was very skillful to gesticulate, although he performs Thai dance vocabularies in demon khon-character style. Finally, he passed all the dance practical tests to entrance as the fourth generation of Thai dance student at Chulalongkorn University. In addition, he received the highest score of aptitude Thai dance test in the moment as well. His total score combining General test and Aptitude exam in Thai dance (written and practice) make the score very high compared to the other competitor in the dance field. In general, the students of science-programme usually study several intensive courses while the art programme is simpler in particular subjects of science and mathematics. Klunchun believes that he is a rational and sceptical person including questioning the things around all the time and try to seek the answer to every story because his learning in the science-programme.

Klunchun thought the Dance Department at that time need male dance student to study. There were few candidates who are a male student in that moment. Only twelve Thai dance students can pass the college entrance. Those are ten females and two male students including Klunchun to study the same class. A large number of female dance pupils practise in several branches of the College of Dramatic Arts across the country. All of them are trained *lakorn* performance styles, which mainly uses female dancers to perform both the male or female

characters. While most of the male dance pupils are trained *khon* dance (particular in monkey and demon characters) rather than *lakorn* performance. Since the purpose of the Thai dance curriculum of Chulalongkorn University did not be set up to overlap dimensions of instruction similar to the College of Dramatic Arts, which teach and award the diploma degree in *khon* dance performance. The dance curriculum in Chulalongkorn University, therefore, has been focused on forms of *lakorn* performance. The course is highlighted on the male and female characters in diverse forms of *lakhon* for instance *lakhon Nok* and *lakorn Nai*. This was a prototype model in which several university dance curriculums were adopted styles of *lakorn* for dance teaching in later time. As the result of many Thai dance programmes focused on teaching *lakorn* performance, this might make a lack of male *khon*-dance students participating in university's dance field. Although there are some male dance students in the university's programmes, most of their expression and presentation in dance performance were tended to be feminine styles. This becomes a disadvantage of dance area in Thai society especially. It was seen as an area or the activities of women significantly. Training and teaching demon and monkey *khon*-characters were ignored in university's dance curriculums. In Thai higher education, there are only two colleges that continue to train these *khon* characters, which are Buditpatanasilp Institute and Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi.

For four years at Chulalongkorn University, he had learned the different forms of Thai dance performances. Whether dancing in male or female characters were the new dance knowledge for him to know other kinds of character and its

expression. Although, at the first time, it is very difficult to study another dance structures and characters in which are dissimilar with the dance character that he was trained. Most people always thought he is the image of a dancer in western style rather than a Thai dance artist because of his works generally are not the traditional forms of Thai performance. In fact, he studied Thai dance by conventional systems (in the university level) and learned demon character outside the education system with master Chaiyot Khummanee as well. Considering his dance learning and training process, he is a Thai dancer inherently. Klunchun (2013) said,

Everyone forgot that I graduated at the Department of Thai Dance, Chulalongkorn University. Most people thought I cannot dance in Thai styles because of my image in the past was not a traditional Thai dancer. The dances and choreographies, that I was trained, in fact, are all Thai classical dance practices. I just did not take it in the traditional presentation in which has remained the same repetitive and monotonous work.

It can be seen that there is a clear dividing line between Thai dance and dance in Western concept. When the artists use the Thai dance skills and techniques to create a modern or contemporary work, most people seen those new works were invented by the creators who no have a profound knowledge of Thai dance. It is just as borrowing or imitating Thai dance steps to make new inventions. Actually most of Klunchun's dance works have been developed by using materials of Thai dance in which were digested and separated from each other. His work in this

paper, *Black and White* (2011), for instance, was developed and embodied the new modern style of khon dance movement performing with Chinese music. Using dance based on Thai classical khon dance accompanying without Thai classical music might be commented that it is not Thai or Thai dance. The creation of new dance works by using selective Thai performance materials and extending the traditional roots as Klunchun did are criticised nowadays. It may be a solution as an alternative way for traditional arts or it may be a destruction of cultural events. As Klunchun attests that

The study at this university is my good fortune. Because of my blood as a *khon* dancer could be blended with the dance knowledge of *lakorn* styles. This is an advantage compared to other students who learn only *khon* or *lakorn* performances (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

He learned all solo dances, duet dances, *Na Phat* performances of the male character in lakhon styles. These dance choreographies are the great materials for him to invent his dance innovations. At the present learning only khon performance, particular in monkeys and demon characters, is very difficult to pursue a career as a professional artist. There are specific forms of Thai traditional performance that can use the knowledge of khon dance skilled fully. Khon dancer cannot do other careers besides as a khon dance instructor or performers of Fine Arts Department. Klunchun (2013) adds a different angle that if Thai dance students would like to be a contemporary dancer in the future they must train khon dance practices. Because of the dance student who was trained male or female characters in Thai dance do not have efficiency enough for dancing. As compared

to khon dance, the potentiality and structure of khon dancer's body are more flexible and stronger than lakon style. The lakorn dancers' body does not open and usually keep dance energy inward. The dance focuses on gorgeous bended-hands and arms movement with slow rhythm and steady pace. When the dancer's body is locked and inflexible by the dance style, they cannot develop into other kinds of dance movement. While the basic dance techniques and routines of demon and monkey khon-characters are more complex and adaptable in term of dancing more than male and female characters. There are many khon dance steps, for example, jumping, leaping, rotating, stomping a foot, lifting a leg in various kinds of rhythm, speed and dynamic in which male and female characters do not have these wide ranges of dance action. The diversity and integrity regard to the elements of khon dance can be substantial materials to create a contemporary choreography.

In the third years in the university, however, he thought he could not be a professional Thai dance artist. Because of the quality of his dancing and dance skills was not as good as it should compare with other classmates. He gave the example that when he rehearsed the dance routines for examination, he often stood in the middle of a group of friends who can dance and remember the routines. So he can copy or follow the dance steps in any directions. He also said that if these skills of learning and practicing were continued into future, he could not be a skilled dance artist or a good dance teacher. For this reason, he also tried to find his new strengths and skills for himself by studying the theatrical subjects. He learned acting technique of modern western theatre at Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University.

Most of Thai dance students do not excel in acting techniques of modern (Western) drama on account of they dance only. Learning the art of drama made him a difference and empowered his abilities himself. After he understood how to express himself and what is the psychology of the characters, he started to be a dancer who can perform as an actor at the same time. "I can play both Eastern and Western drama" (Klunchun, Feb 2013). Associate Professor Pornrat Damrhung was Khunchun's teacher who firstly found his dance talent. She is a drama lecturer at Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. She was invited to teach the choreography course at Department of Dance because shortage of dance instructors during that time. Klunchun met her when he learned in the third years. Her teaching style was a turning point in his dance learning and choreographing. Obviously being a lecturer of modern drama, she taught by applying drama process and techniques into the creative choreography. Klunchun had learned modern drama processes and skills with unconsciously. He recalled that he lost the first two classes of Damrhung. Klunchun remembered precisely what Damrhung taught him in her class of choreography. Klunchun said there were long benches setting up in the meeting room. Damrhung used an experimental approach in order to demonstrate some dance composition to her students. The dance students were all under the benches then let them removing and reaching out any parts of their body to make a dance composition. Later trying to dance by using some parts of their body. Some students used their head to move. Some people shaped their hands in Thai dance styles. These images were attached to his memory in which change his perspectives on Thai dance and choreography.



These new perspectives on the Thai dance seem to be interested and amazing for Klunchun although it might be weird for Thai dance student in general. He paid attention to this class while the other friends who adhered to traditional dance classes uncompromisingly did not understand the teaching process (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

#### **2.4 The Theatrical Experiences of Pichet Klunchun**

In the country, there are few male dance artists who can dance very well in Thai classical style. Klunchun's talent and his outstanding performance in dance skill has been appreciated by many audiences including professor Dumrhung. For this reason, she introduced and recommended him to her colleague, Janaprakal (Khru Chang) Chandruang<sup>21</sup> in order to give him more chances and theatrical experience. He started to work with Chandruang by performing the outdoor light and sound performance in 1996 when he was a third year university. Later continued to perform until Chandruang persuaded him into cooperate with his drama troupe. At a final year before his graduation, Klunchun decided to be a member of join Chandruang's Moradokmai Theatre Troupe.<sup>22</sup> He gave himself two years time for working as a full-time staff with the troupe. He said to the teacher

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<sup>21</sup> Janaprakal (Khru Chang) Chandruang is a playwright, theatre actor and director. He established Moradokmai Theatre Troupe in 1995 after working as a drama lecture at Chulalongkorn University for 20 years. In 2009, he received the sixth Silapatorn award for Performing Arts.

<sup>22</sup> Moradokmai Theatre Troupe was found Janaprakal (Khru Chang) Chandruang as a professional theatre company at the first time. Nowadays it is not only a performance troupe but also a full-time theatre school in a rural community based on youth development through theatre, Zen philosophy and sustainable development practices.

(Chandruang) “if he felt it does not better or it can not survive, he would like to do something else” (Klunchun, Feb 2013). At this company he learned the cognitive process and knowledge of modern theatre including had experiences in directing, teaching and working for television. In Klunchun’s opinion, Chandruang is a special person. His works mostly were created and produced by using unique skills of the actors, which he had. Every tasks or events that Klunchun participated in, Klunchun was usually became a great theatrical element of Chandruang’s new theatre inventions. As the playwright, Chandruang regularly adapted his play by creating a specific character, which has related abilities or behaviours as similar as Klunchun’s skills. *Kon Tao Kab Kon*<sup>23</sup> (*Mai Tao Kab Chang*), for example, Chandruang adapted the ghost character of the play to be a Likay<sup>24</sup> ghost who can move in Thai dance style. In early stage of working, Klunchun did not has acting skill sufficiently. Hence the playwright underlined him to play a tight-lipped character but focused instead on the expression of Thai dance instead and inner feelings. Afterwards he continued to act in many plays of Moradokmai Theatre

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<sup>23</sup> *Kon Tao Kab Kon* (*Mai Tao Kab Chang*) is the Thai version of *Mann ist Mann* translated by Janaprakal Chandruang. *Mann ist Mann* (translated into English generally as *Man Equals Man* or *A Man’s a Man*) was written by German modernist playwright Bertolt Brecht. The Thai translation was performed by Moradokmai Theatre Troupe in January 1995. Later in 2000, it was reproduced and supported by Goethe-Institut, Thailand for the event of Brecht’s theatre works

<sup>24</sup> Likay is a form of Thai popular folk theatre. The performance depends on the performers’ skills of improvisation in performing, singing and dancing in Thai dance styles with extravagant costumes.

Troupe. For instance *Kakee*<sup>25</sup> and *Nitan Vetarn*<sup>26</sup>, these performances have more monologues and dialogues for him.

During working at Moradokmai Theatre Troupe around three years, Klunchun had been invited to perform with many theatre artists and choreographers in the forefront of Thailand's performing arts. He has frequently participated with the productions of Bruce Gaston<sup>27</sup> (The founder of Fong Nam Band) and Vararom Pachimsawat (The founder of Company of Performing Artist, Thailand). In July 1997, he was invited to be a role of Garuda in *Kakee* (1997), the first performance of the Company of Performing Artist at Royal Orchid Sheraton, Thailand. The Russian choreographer, Vatcheslav Vetrov presented the diverse styles of dance by integrating and adapting dance techniques to narrate this story as similar as the Thai dance-drama form. The choreography was used the movement of classical ballet, Thai classical dance and khon movement to be highlighted. Afterwards, the company produced *Manohra* performance on November of the same year at Bangkok Theatre. Klunchun was invited to be a

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<sup>25</sup> *Kakee* is a Thai literature which being also part of the Thai folklore. The story is based on a tale of classical Thai poetry (Kaki klon Suphap) written by Cho Phraya Phrakhlung (Hon).

<sup>26</sup> *Nitan Vetan* is a Thai version of *Vikram and The Vampire* (English version) translated by Prince Bidyalongkorn. The English version was adapted by Richard F. Burton from *Tales of Hindu Devilry*, the ancient Sanskrit literature includes 25 various sub-stories.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce Gaston is an American musician who has lived in Thailand since the age of 22 years. He founded the Fong Nam band with Boonyong Ketkong in 1979. It is a Thai band that creates innovative music blending the classical Thai orchestra with Western music. Based on the core idea of the two sides of different music orientation and combining various techniques with a blend of contemporary music for a long time. Gaston received the Silpathorn Kitikhun Award for Music in 2009. This award was created for senior contemporary artists over 50 years of age.

leading role, *Phra Suthon*. Likewise, this show he employed mainly Thai dance movement to collaborate with other dance styles. While the basic dance style of *Manohra*, half bird-half woman creature called Kinnari, was emphasised on classical ballet. It is surprising that many Thai directors requested him oftentimes to perform in diverse versions of *Kakee* performances in particular the role of Garuda in the story. Those directors are Janaprakal Chandruang, Parichat Jungwiwattanaporn, Vararom Pachimsawat and Mattani Rutnin. In addition, he was a director this story by himself. It seems he is the prototype of playing this role. Klunchun siad it might be his capability in khon dance or his own physical appearance and personality that can refer to Garuda's character. Due to the elegant and powerful appearance of demon character can be applied to dance as a Garuda in which demonstrate masculine, formidable, honestly and appealing. He regularly performed the character that can show his unique dance skills. This made him as "a Thai dancer who can speak" (Klunchun, Feb 2013). The last play that he rendered with the troupe was *Ranad Aek* (Thai alto xylophone). He was the main character who can play the Thai bamboo xylophone. Because playing the xylophone is his musical skill in the blood, certainly he can present this role very well.

However, according to the theatre troupe in Thailand had no financial supports from the government or external organisations. So most of theatre artists need to work and find their own independent jobs to gain the income for producing their performance that they love. Maladokmai Theatre Troupe was mainly found for creating and producing theatre performance and its arts. On the other side,

Chandruang set up the commercial company named “*Chang Kid*” to earn income for supporting the theatre troupe. The company produced the educational programs of the Ministry of Education for youth. Klunchun handled many duties and responsibilities at that time. He was a producer, editing controller and being an emcee for the TV programme sometimes. The company, in addition, organised the *Actor Junior Summer Art Camp* to teach acting and art workshops for children. He worked long hours in the daytime as a producer or a teacher while during the night rehearsed the performance and edited TV recordings. Moreover, the stage performances were created for the children and their parents who attended in the Art Camp. These two different functions and a hard workload made him did not enough time to do anything effectively. This system has been continued in the performing arts cycle of Thailand from generation to generation. Klunchun states that we should cancel this system because it is unsustainable and hard to develop our art with these kinds of support. In this country, the Arts is not a welfare state. The government should use the Arts as a tool for educating and developing their people. He asserts, that “this is why I had to kill off this system by attempting to create my own dance company seriously and concretely” (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

After he resigned from Maladokmai Theatre Troupe, he had the good fortune to work with Patravadi Theatre for one and a half years. Firstly, he performed the long-term performance of Patravadi Theatre, *Chittakam Ramakian Ton Sahassadecha* on February 1997 to April 1998. Patravadi Theatre created many contemporary productions and produced a group of performers who have many kinds of Western dance skills. Patravadi Mejudhon, the founder and

producer resorts to Thai traditional performance forms. The art of *khon* performance was raised to reinvent the new presentation by cooperating with *khon* artists of the Fine Arts Department, Thailand. The first generation of invited artists were; Somjet Phuna as Phra Lak, Petra Srivaranont as Sahassadecha, Pichet Klunchun as Moonplum, Pachara Buathong as Nang Montho and Chulachart Aranyanak as Tosakanth. Chulachart Aranyanak was the choreographer while Prasat Thongaram was the narrator (Chittakam 253). All these performers have been very prominent professional artists in Thai dance field today. The contemporary work maintained using many of conventions of movement based on its classical form of *khon* dance. While the show was employed manipulating the huge shadow puppet in order to make audience's fantasy and imagination on the screen. Performers had gesticulated *khon* and Thai dance vocabularies along with displaying a puppet figure. The puppet did not a one flat piece as the Thai traditional shadow puppet (*Nang Yai*). Some parts of puppet's body can move and dance separately. The puppets were made from engraving plastic and cardboard in which multiple colouring both opaque and transparent. Its techniques and presentations made the impression of creative shadow puppet with *khon* performance in order to reinvigorate the contemporary audiences who never interested in *khon*. Moreover, the *khon* costumes and decorations were cut down some of its details. For instance, some performers did not wear the shirts in traditional *khon*-costume but were painted their body in specific colour according to the characteristics conventionally. Wearing the traditional *khon* masks are maintain the conservative style. This show, however, stimulated many performers

in the Patravadi Theatre turned to practise *khon* and Thai dance. The theatre invited the *khon* master, Rakob Bhodives, from the Fine Arts Department, Thailand to train *khon* for the company performers. Knowing and training the basic Thai dance skills are necessary in order to apply and utilise it in a proper way. If the actor-dancers do not really know it could be taken out without meaning. As a result of the success of this *khon* performance, the government continuously supported this show under the project of *Khon Han Song*.<sup>28</sup> Its touring performance travelled across the country both in Bangkok and upcountry several hundred rounds.

Klunchun has a good fortune and chance to work with artists from diverse fields. Most of them were recognised and renowned both nationally and internationally whether in the fields of Thai dance, theatre arts, or international dance and music. He mentions, “the experiences with masters, senior artists and friends in the diversity of performing arts fields cultivated his knowledge to grow up” (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

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<sup>28</sup> *Khon Han Song* is a *khon* performance project of Patravadi Theatre sponsored by The Energy Policy and Planning Office, Ministry of Energy, Thailand. The show was created to promote energy conservation in order to celebrate a year of Thai energy conservation. The show was resized to be a small scale of *Chittakam Ramakian Ton Sahassadecha* and adapted natural and recycle materials to create a work of art following theme of energy saving. There were 30 members for touring performance in which master Rakob Bhodives was the *khon* dance trainer and advisor of the show at that time.

## 2.5 Working as a university lecturer

After working for a year and a half at Patravadi Theatre, then, he had to decide whether work as the regular member or not. Patravadi offered him to take charge of Thai performance part of the theatre while Manop Meejamrus was responsible for Western performance part. He therefore consulted with Pornrat Damrhung who encouraged him to be a university lecturer. In 1998, he decided to be work ad the Department of Dramatic Arts under the Faculty of Humanities, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University due to a lack of theatrical lecturer. There was only two lecturers including Klunchun. Since that time, he had the idea to build efficiently dance and performance ability for a new generation of university student. In addition, working as a university lecturer or government employee seemed to be sustainable in the career rather than a freelance artist. He worked here for a year until resigned to teach in other university. Klunchun agrees that being a lecturer at the first step was very difficult and complicated because he did not understand how to adjust himself into the system of the university. The bureaucratic culture, the style of teaching and its curriculum of this university became his problem. He was assigned to collaborate with Thai dance department to produce the annual performance which was *Chalawan*, a literature of *lakorn Nok* form. On the other hand through his modern perspective, he created this experimental theatre work in which cut its performance conventions down. It was presented as a modern stage show rather than Thai traditional theatre such as creating a platform in middle of the university's pool to play. He made many conflicts in the creative performance-process depending on the conventions of



Thai traditional style. Presenting the modern thought through performance was criticised and commented. It was hardly acceptable especially for the senior teachers and masters. However, he restates that “working and creating the show for this university are very worthwhile experience because he can do anything fully” (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

Afterwards he moved to teach at the Department of Thai Dance, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand. He still expected to teach dance students with progressive idea alike him in order to create his own dance. Teaching Thai Dance practice courses in of this university were interested for him that he can emphasise directly modern way of learning. While the previous university, it may be difficult to adjust the way of the paradigm of senior teachers to accept art works outside the traditional framework of the Thai dance. However, he still has obstacles as ever which are the attaching with the traditional paradigm of Thai dance teaching and learning. He called that is “culture of *Nattasin* (Thai dance) people” (Klunchun, Feb 2013). For instance; perspectives on creativity of Thai dance in particular traditional performances can not be out of the box and its conventions; bias of teaching that pay attention solely to a beloved and satisfied student who feel as a special; taking more time up to two hours for dressing up and ten minutes for warm up before performing. It is very different in term of a professional career as compared to dancing in the international stage that he experienced directly. These culture and system in Thai dance are unacceptable for him. Teaching dance in Thai educational system does not pay attention to the quality of dance work and a potential of Thai dancer but focus on other elements

and spectacles. In addition, he thought working as a university lecturer and dealing with the government system were often frustrating. It should be an independence in workplace where can work out about quality of teaching than its quantity. Teachers in this nine-to-five system has been gradually become a robot teacher (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

## **2.6 The First Period of Development of Pichet Klunchun's Dance Works (1998-2003)**

Pichet Klunchun's works have been created and recreated in different kinds of performances such as Thai classical dance, contemporary dance, and other live performances. He not only performs by himself as a solo dancer-performer but also works in different theatrical positions as a collaborator, choreographer, director and producer. Additionally, he has often been invited to be a special dance teacher/master for instructing in Thai dance workshops both inside and outside his home country. While his recognition and pride are related to classical dance, and he gives full respect to classical dance, which he has been immersed in for decades, he also invents works in response to contemporary realities. With his unique ways, his outstanding and well-liked masterpieces have usually been reworked and reproduced in large numbers through touring performances around the world. The development of his performing art works can be categorised in three periods: the time before establishing his dance company (1998-2003), founding LifeWork Company (2004-2008), and renaming this company to be the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company (2009-present).

The first period in the development of his dance works was 1998 to 2003. This was a moment when he attempted to experiment with his work in multiple professions and his search for his identity. His endeavours were to ensure different kinds of professions, which were suitable for him. In Thailand, it is difficult for a professional dancer to survive by him/herself since there are no professional private dance companies. He therefore worked both as a university lecturer and a professional dance practitioner at the same time. At first, he performed with several acclaimed Thai theatre practitioners. Afterwards, gaining theatrical experience from many of the aforementioned companies, he changed his career to become a university lecturer. At that point, he hoped to teach a new generation of Thai dance students with an open-minded attitude to develop contemporary dance work in the country, emphasising that there are not many Thai classical dancers in the dance field since there are no dance private companies employing full-time professional dancers there (Klunchun, Feb 2013). Meanwhile, while a university lecturer, he collaborated and created his dance pieces as a freelance dance artist as well and attained valuable work experience with renowned Thai artists and prestigious international practitioners. However, the overlapping boundaries of work became a source of conflict later on since he had to decide between being a university lecturer or being a professional dance artist. Most of his dance works in this period were solo dance and collaborative performances. In 1998, as a dance teacher at Srinakharinwirot University, he received a chance to choreograph two shows for a world-class sporting event: *Rung Arunothai* and *Pra Mahachanok*. These were the light and sound performance for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 13<sup>th</sup>

Asian Games in Bangkok, Thailand. All of these extravaganzas and his reputation have led him to direct the light and sound performance for *The River of Kings* for two second consecutive years. The first one was performed in December 1999, followed by *The River of Kings 2* in January 2001.

It is noticeable that in the many crises in his life, Dumrhung was a significant person that had a crucial influence on him. She gave him great inspiration and opportunities for his career both as a lecturer and a dance artist so that he could flourish, whether in introducing him to work with Janaprakal Chandruang or jthe Patravadi Theatre, both of which gave him an opportunity to become a dance artist. Additionally, she recommended him to the Head of the performing arts programmes at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University and Srinakharinwirot University as a university lecturer. She realised that in Thailand a lecturer is a professional career from which a person can earn a living by using his or her Thai dance skills. Additionally, several of Dumrhung's theatre productions at Chulalongkorn University were choreographed by him and in which he performed the leading role. Productions such *Nontok* (1999), *Lui Fire (Walking on fire)*(2000), *Sida Sri Ram* (2005), and so forth were experimental and integrated elements of Thai traditional theatre such as Thai literary works and Thai classical dance and music, including the Thai shadow puppet. All of these were blended into her contemporary Thai theatre. Her works adapted and reinterpreted various episodes of *Ramakien* into new contexts.

*Nontuk* (1999), for instance, was revised as a contemporary play script and directed by Damrhung. It is a short experimental movement piece. Klunchun

danced in the role of *Nang Narai* (Vishnu god), while Dangkamon Na-pombejra<sup>29</sup> played the role of *Nontuk* (reincarnation of Ravana). *Nontuk* is one episode of *Ramakien* literature. The decoding of Thai dance vocabulary and searching the implication in this literary reading were used as a process of deconstruction. The director emphasised specific interpretation and theme. The usurpation of power between humans in different classes (between gods and demons) in the *Ramakien* story raised the thematic concept. The meaning of usurpation and political issues in the story are a myth, which has not been unfolded or revealed in Thai theatre significantly. Dumrhung (2013) personally does not like the method of a linear plot or linear narrative. Opposite the traditional method of Thai classical theatre, most of her theatrical works have utilised a nonlinear/disrupted narrative, deconstruction, and montage techniques to articulate themes. In postmodern theatre, deconstruction is an essential method. This process allows for the open interpretation of the translation and for the discovery of other meanings of texts; there is no longer a need to adhere to a fixed meaning or the aesthetic of the performance. The process of deconstruction of postmodern performance considered opposing the pure aesthetic of conventional theatre or turning the common aesthetic around. The common belief and understanding from reading through fixed convention are challenged with offering the different angles of interpretation. The deconstructive process of Damrhung in her theatre making was displayed more explicitly in her later works. *Lui Fire* (2000) is a pioneering and

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<sup>29</sup> Dangkamon Na-pombejra is a drama lecturer and the Head of Department of Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Arts Chulalongkorn University. He is an influential actor-director of Thai contemporary theatre particular in Thai university's productions.

experimental work that seeks an innovative way to build anew tradition for Thai modern theatre. This work attempts to interweave the presentation of Thai traditional theatre, such as its elements of dance and music, into modern Thai spoken drama. Although these collaborative works of Damrhung and Klunchun were incongruous and it was difficult to follow the stories of the plays, Jungwiwattanaporn (2000) admired this experimental work and thought that it was “a revolutionary form of Thai theatre to break away from the traditional framework with preserving the essence or spirit of Thai Dance.” The sequences of montages, leaving a sustainable plot and breaking down the wall between the performer and audience in the performance reflect the principle and idea of challenging the traditional theatre norm, similar to the works of Brecht and Artaud in order to make an unconventional performance. These kinds of deconstruction were more exemplified in *Sida Sri Ram* (2005). The label of new Thai traditional theatre was used to publicise the work and to emphasise the collaborative process between diverse artists: choreographer, music composer, and artistic designer. Damrhung focused on revising and reinterpreting the play script by using Sida, the female character of Ramakien, to question the idealism of (Thai) women in modern times. Through Damrhung’s feminist political thought, this work criticised the diverse stereotypical images of women both in Thai literature and society through the use of the montage technique and sequences of women’s images to present a series of disconnected pictures and scenes on the stage. Damrhung (2013) stated that the creative research and performance in academic space are very essential because artists can freely experiment their new making processes. Therefore, she

has frequently supported Klunchun and has had him participate in her production so that he could experiment with and refine his theatrical skills.

### **2.6.1 Asia Pacific Performance Exchange Program (APPEX)**

After his success in the national performances and working as a university dance lecturer, Damrhung suggested that he apply for a grant from the Asian Cultural Council. With some financial help from Dumrhung, *Nontuk (1999)*, a male-duet movement piece, was also presented at the Asia Pacific Performance Exchange Program (APPEX)<sup>30</sup> in 1999. Through her foresight, she tried to push him to be acclaimed at the international level. She believed that this exchange program was a great way for Klunchun to expose his work: “Building an international reputation is an important strategy, which he has to do in order to be recognised by Thai audiences” (Dumrhung 2013).

Accordingly, with Pornrat’s personal connection, with Cecily Cook and Ralph Samuelson, the Programme Officer and Senior Advisor of the Asian Cultural Council (ACC)<sup>31</sup> respectively, who at that time were searching for a new Asian

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<sup>30</sup> The Asia Pacific Performance Exchange Program (APPEX) is an international residency program that supports cross-cultural and interdisciplinary understanding. Particularly regarding American and Asian artists, both traditional and contemporary artists of diverse disciplines have been invited to work together as intensive artists in residency sessions at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and in Indonesia. See further information at APPEX’s homepage: <http://www.wacd.ucla.edu/cip/residency/asia-pacific-performance-exchange>.

<sup>31</sup> The Asian Cultural Council (ACC) began in 1963 as an organisation to support transformative cultural exchange between the United States and Asia. Artists, scholars, and professionals in the fields of visual and performing arts and humanity projects are award grants for their research, study, and creative work. See further information at ACC’s home page: <http://www.asianculturalcouncil.org>

artist to award the ACC scholarship, Dumrhung recommended Klunchun for the award. In next two years Klunchun became the first Thai artist to receive this scholarship as an artist in residence. The ACC gave him a 7-month stay in the United States that his exposure to performing arts will affect his creative and academic growth as the young choreographer. The program consisted of a two-month stay in New York City and a three-month residency at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In the meantime, he taught Thai classical dance as well as performed at the Asia Pacific Performance Exchange Program (APPEX) concert on June 9, 2001. In addition, as the final part of this art exposure, he spent six weeks participating in the American Dance Festival at Duke University in North Carolina.

Klunchun joined various types of dance classes such as modern dance, African dance, Flamenco, and contemporary dance. However, he was greatly energised by participating in William Forsythe's class. In his class, Forsythe taught and discussed the way in which he changed himself from a classical ballet dancer to a contemporary choreographer. For Forsythe, classical dance training is necessary for dancers to build their physicality perfectly. However, dancing in the classical format, after all, might make prevent dancers from having cognitive and creative processes. Since he (Forsythe) did not want to adhere to the classical form, he therefore changed himself and invented his own dance technique and style (Jungwiwattanaporn 37). It was not only William Forsythe who was an



inspiration to Klunchun, but Judy Mitoma<sup>32</sup> also challenged Klunchun to progress in his career as an artist. After rehearsing his solo dance *Chui Chai* (2001), Mitoma directly appreciated his dance demonstration, in particular by portraying the female role in the classical dance style (Benjakai character). However, she posed a question that provoked him to think: “I know you learned this dance piece from your master, then who you are that I want to know today?” (Jungwiwattanaporn 36). This dance experience and studying abroad in the USA under the Asian Cultural Council’s funding was a turning point in his life. He questioned his identity, his dance creativity, and how he could earn his living by performing *khon* dance as an artist. The traditional style of *khon* performance cannot be performed as a solo dancer following the narrative of the story. One warrior dance of or an episode of the *Ramakien* story must employ a group of dancers of around 5-10 persons for the performance. In addition, the dancer has to portray only one stereotype character that he/she has learned. Traditionally, the dancer cannot shift his or her character to another one on stage as in the modern realistic or naturalistic styles. For Thai traditional theatre many kinds of transformations or shifting of characters on stage require the use of two dancers at least for presentation. For instance, *Yuk Rop*, the fighting scene between Tosakanth (Ravana) and Phra Ram (Rama), is a

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<sup>32</sup> Judy Mitoma is founder and Director of the UCLA Center for Intercultural Performance and Professor of Dance in the Department of World Arts & Cultures. In 1995, she established the only arts department in the United States based on interdisciplinary, international and intercultural research with a performance agenda by focusing on the Asia Pacific Performing Arts Exchange (APPEX) Fellowship residency program. With initial support from the Ford Foundation, APPEX programs have hosted more than 300 international artists in residential retreats, performance projects, and creative collaboration. See further information: <http://www.wacd.ucla.edu/cip/about/meet-staff>

famous set of the *khon* show, which can be performed traditionally on many occasions and in many places. The show was selected the four main characters, Tosakanth, Phra Ram (Rama), Phra Luk (Luasamana) and Hanuman, for the performance. Klunchun can only perform the Tosakanth by using the demon dance practice that he was trained for. While Klunchun was required to perform solo at the ACC programme, he began to experiment and search for a new way of utilising *khon* for presentation. Finally, he found a solution and alternative ways when he demonstrated his performance of *Chui Chai* (2001). The interrogation and sharing of the experience of this programme impacted his thoughts and his spirit and made him seek an alternative method to express himself as a *khon* dancer.

Performing and participating in workshop of Asia Pacific Performance Exchange Program (APPEX) indicated that Pichet had arrived in the world of international dance. “Go inter”, a short form of being international recognised, became a significant tactic and widely used in Thai society to gain local fame. Likewise, many Thai films used “go inter” concept to make achievement and local recognition. For example, Wisit Sasanatieng’s retro cowboy flick *Fa thalai jone* (2000) became the first Thai film was public screened at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2001. This Thai cinema “clearly signalled that Thailand had arrived in the world of international cinema” and “seemed to have truly “gone international” (Harrison Amazing 321, Harrison Somewhere 33). In following Chapters will demonstrate and analyse Pichet Khunchun ‘s works, which premiere and gain international fame from world dance stages and festivals.

### 2.6.2 *Chui Chai*

*Chui Chai* dances, in terms of Thai classical dance, means a solo dance of one character that is proud of his/her (magical) ability to transform or to dress him/herself up beautifully to be another character (Thepwong 2). Thai classical dancers traditionally need to portray the dance exquisitely, and with elegance and rhythmical movements. Every role in this kind of dance has to express the characters changing their appearances and taking pride in their own beauty to their own satisfaction. Klunchun was inspired by *Chui Chai Benjakai Pleang*<sup>33</sup> (transformation of *Benjakai*), which is a solo dance in the *Nang Loi* episode of *Ramakien*. The female Thai classical dancer takes the role of *Benjakai* by performing in a way similar to Sida's character—the expression of the ideal virtuous woman. In addition, the character customarily depicts her admiration and satisfaction in transforming her appearance with happiness into the dance. In *Chui Chai* (2001), Klunchun originally performed as a solo dancer in the APPEX programme in the United States. It was held at the Japan-American Theatre in L.A. in 2001 and restaged again in Denmark in 2002. Although it is a solo dance like the tradition in terms of form, he portrays the role of *Benjakai* with different dance techniques and interpretation. In contrast to the traditional expression, Klunchun's

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<sup>33</sup> *Chui Chai Benjakai Pleang* belongs to the renowned 'Nang Loi' (The Floating Lady) episode of *Ramakien* Thai epic. In this episode, Tosakanth (Ravana) commands his niece, Benjakai to disguise herself as the lifeless Sida (Rama's consorts) to lure Rama into mourning. Later she transforms herself and exhibits an artificial manner of Sita in order to have an audience with Tosakanth. Afterwards she floats herself as a dead Sida along the river to fool Rama into ending the war. The lyrics and play script of this episode were composed by HRH Prince Narit (Thepwong 7).

version retold and reinterpreted this character with negative emotions. As such, sadness, anxiety, fear, and panic were the inner feelings of the character. According to the story, he interpreted *Benjakai* as somebody that does not want to transform herself to be Sida because she also worries to death about going to the war area. However, as *Benjakai* has to carry out transforming herself for salvaging her father's and family's dignity<sup>34</sup>, she also has to obey her uncle's command (Ravana) to end the war. Pornrat (2013) points out that Klunchun chose this character to develop as his solo performance because the character has a variety of dimensions for interpretation and presentation. The dance demonstrates Klunchun's ability to apply the knowledge and techniques of modern spoken drama into traditional Thai dance performance. Focusing on character development and interpreting dramatic action such as the character's inner thoughts, feelings, and objectives, these expressed the conflict of the character, which makes the character alive with different manners of expression. The term Chui Chai means "transformation" from one form to another form (Klunchun Home, 2013). The performance aimed to demonstrate shifting moments of one thing into another by focusing on the transformation of "the character" and also transformation of "the dancer's identity". The piece shows the struggles and conflicts between Thai classical and abstract dance forms. The character of *Benjakai* completely separated her external appearance and internal spirituality. For the Thai traditional

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<sup>34</sup>According to the Ramakien story, *Benjakai* is a daughter of Phiphek (Vibhishana) who is a betrayal brother of Tosakanth (Ravana). Phiphek joined the force of Rama when Tosakanth refused to return Sida and expelled him from Longka. In order to recover his father's back, *Benjakai* has no choice but to obey her uncle.

dance, the audience can view the image of (disguised) Sida as the external appearance of the character, while the internal spirituality as Benjakai's inner voices and thoughts cannot be expressed through the traditional dance of *Chui Chai* if it adhered to the traditional aesthetic of the dance tradition. In addition, Klunchun moved forward to an upper complicated level of interpretation. As a dance-performer he created this character as a metaphor of a Thai classical dancer that is struggling in the contemporary (dance) world. In the choreographic process, Klunchun demonstrated a strange empathy with the Bejakai character by saying the following:

I felt sad just as she did. I say this, because I moved to contemporary dance in 2001, and I wasn't sure that I really wanted to shift from *khon* to contemporary dance. It was very painful. When you change the way you move, you don't immediately know what you're doing. People look at you, and they may like what they see, but it's not you. Like Benyakai. When she transformed herself to look like Sita and went back to see Ravana, he liked her, but it wasn't really her (Shapiro-Phim Web, 2013).

Klunchun's comparison and reinterpretation were a challenge to the transnational and conservative audiences, including himself as a dance-performer and choreographer. The show teased the audiences by employing *khon* drama as "a gateway into a meditation on tradition and modernity" (O'Connell 2010). Since Klunchun has a foot in these two worlds, therefore, "his goal seems to be to nudge the traditionalists to look outward and anew at their art, while showing off the exquisite qualities of his native dance to others" (Parker, 2010). The transformation

to a dualistic worldview was carried out in his piece; *khon* versus contemporary dance, tradition versus modernity, the myth (belief) versus reality, external appearance versus internal spiritual, including a male body versus a female character. In the later period, all of these contestations were reworked complicatedly in many diverse versions of *Chui Chai* (2002, 2008, 2010, 2011). The idea of a solo performance has been developed to enlarge the scale as a group choreography and composition. All of the diverse versions of *Chui Chai* have been changed entirely.

Wendy Perron, the editor of *Dance Magazine*, claimed that the world premiere of *Chui Chai* at *the Fall for Dance Festival* in 2008 was one of her top-ten dance works in terms of fusion. She argues that this work of Klunchun was a “resplendent fusion” in which the dancers were transformed from “ancient to contemporary, male to female, and spareness to splendour” (Perron 2008). In the beginning of *Chui Chai* (2008)<sup>35</sup>, the audiences were fascinated with the exotics of the Thai court dance style performed by a group of female dancers in the role of Benjakai. They appeared out of the wings and stood still, apart on their own circle platforms of lighting with traditionally-ornamented costumes. Shimmering garish gowns and pagoda-liked headdresses expressed their unreal imaginary world. The dancers walked slowly and softly with their sticky steps. Their upper body followed their arms and hand movement with hyperextended fingers. The myths and unreal world of traditional dance were broken when Klunchun, a male dancer, stepped

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<sup>35</sup> See also the excerpt video dance of *Chiu Chai* 2008 at Jacob’s Pillow Dance Interactive Web: <http://danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org/dance/pichet-klunchun>

onto the stage. Baring his torso and dressing only in low-cut jeans, this costume made his appearance as a modern man in everyday life. He performed the remarkable duet with Kornkarn Rungsawang, who portrayed the role of Benyakai with a full traditional costume, including a female traditional dance mask. Klunchun and Rungsawang started by sitting apart in two pools of light and moved according to Thai traditional dance style. A comparison between the external appearance of *Bejakai* (Rungsawang) and her internal spirit (Klunchun) was embodied in the communication. They thus melted into one as the dancers dialogued together. At this point, Klunchun tried to display the contestation of two different polarities, not only tradition and modernity, but also reality in appearance and abstraction of thought (body and mind). Klunchun employed the old style of female *khon* mask. Using *khon* mask for the princess character does not appear because today's female dancers mostly do stage make-up instead. Klunchun encountered and imitated Benjakai's Thai classical movements from Rungsawang. Then he gradually shifted Thai traditional movement to a contemporary (modern) dance style while Rungsawang moved around the centre stage pool of light until finally widening the curve into an exit. In order to portray both the disorder of his mind between Benjakai's inner thought paralleled with his own feeling, a contemporary dance technique was a good choice for the expression. Tradition encounters modernity manifestly through his solo dancing following a long duet with this female dancer.



Figure 2.4 Chui Chai, World Premiere at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, 2010

Beyond the “transformation of Benjakai”, the viewers will notice the “transformation of Thai society” at the same time. The meaning of “transformation” raised many political issues and became a sign to be placed in the second half of some performance versions in order to criticise the political situations of contemporary Thai society. His performances deconstruct and break many barriers and beliefs of tradition in Thai traditional theatre. For *Chui Chai* (2010), it “takes us from Thai traditions to Thai modernity. On the way there’s a fair sprinkling of deconstruction” (Macaulay, 2010). The show was intervened with a video interview and questionnaire of current Thais who opined about some of the characters in the *Ramakien* story. Regarding Sida, the leading female character in particular, most common Thais in the video presentation compared and



expressed their idea of this character as a beautiful queen, a superstar or a super model in current modern Thai society. The answers of Thai interviewees were translated on the screen showed that no one knew much about the mythical characters in Ramakien. At this point, the transnational audiences could learn that in fact “there are plenty of Thais today whose notions of Sida and other characters are similarly muddled (Macaulay, 2010). Not only were the myths and beliefs of tradition performance dismantled and criticised radically on the stage; other theatrical elements were deconstructed heterogeneously. The stage costumes ranged in diversity between modern outfits and Thai traditional dance costumes. Some dancers wore full Thai traditional costumes while some mixed traditional and modern attire to express the bipolar differences and contradictions. Blue jeans, denim hot pants, and pieces of Thai dance costumes were worn as a collage. A wide variety of mixed movements was invented for the stage. Basically, Thai classical movement was the main dance practice and technique of the performance. In many diverse versions of *Chui Chai*, traditional choreography, traditional music, and lyrics of *Chui Chai Bajakai Pheang* were still employed. These theatrical elements were used in his solo performance in a first half, while in the second half it was changed over time depending on the specific political contents at that time. His solo dancing concentrated on the physical experience of weight, the flow of momentum, and the use of energy in relation to gravity that made up his movement dynamic and sequence. These kinds of locomotion resembled western contemporary dance terms of the fall and recovery movements of Graham and Limon's technique.

In the first part of some versions of *Chui Chai* <sup>36</sup>(2008, 2010), his solo section exhibited slow motion, the graceful and elaborate gestures of Thai classical dance portraying the *Bajakai* character. Afterwards these were gradually embodied and slightly modified into the expressive and dynamic movements of the contemporary dance style. This juxtaposition and these transitional movements between the two different dance genres demonstrated how a varied diversity of movements could be integrated and interlaced harmoniously. There were in contrast to the movements of the second half, which are heterogeneous, untidy and chaotic. The appropriation of some signatures of Thai classical dance, popular dance poses, and movements in everyday life was intermixed. For example, some Thai hand movements and gesticulations, jazz and aerobic exercise dancing poses and suggestive sways of the pelvis were confusedly invented and composited. The aim was to portray conflicts and the chaos of the various depolarised elements in modern society. The inconsistency of the dance in the second half reflected chaotic society and perhaps created some negative feedbacks and criticism. Parker (2010) criticised as follows:

Though a quietly charismatic dancer, Klunchun's presence in 'Chui Chai' is fairly peripheral, and his modernising influence on the other dancers is ultimately the larger focus. I found myself wanting more of him, wanting at least some moments of explosive dancing. But this began to feel like unnecessary impatience on my part, and so I let it

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<sup>36</sup> See also the excerpt video dance of *Chiu Chai* 2010 from Jacob's Pillow Dance Interactive at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EfBYJZT7chk>

go. In the theatre, our time must be given over to the performers. They'll tell us what they've come to tell us, in whatever way they need to communicate.

Macaulay opines that the dance and sound in *Chui Chai* (2010) have seldom been interestingly connected. Its hybrid of Thai movement accompanied by neo-romantic piano music in the final part is a 'meandering notion' of modernity (Macaulay 2010). From my point of view, his diverse interpretations rely on the socio-political contents and the target audiences of each specific time. Each version retained the essential concept of "transformations", whether of the character or of contemporary Thai society, reasonably. The production combined and deconstructed the traditions of *khon* with modern theatrical techniques and components to reflect the political contents of contemporary Thai society. It might be difficult for westerners to understand all of the signs and connotations of the political conflicts reflected in his production. Deconstruction and the breaking of all traditional norms as explored by Klunchun might be confusing and seem unworthy. Likewise, according to Macaulay's criticism, *Chui Chai* (2010) "is not principally about dance or theatre; it's an inconclusive, artistically tepid theory about the climate change in Thai culture. Here's this old tale from the Ramayana, but no: here instead are these modern Thais who both do and don't believe in it". However, *Chui Chai* demonstrates Klunchun's potential for using dramatic interpretations, and the deconstruction of Thai traditional theatre in the choreographic process. Klunchun's unconventional personal movement and his contemporary works indicate that he is a *khon* dancer and might be the only

postmodern choreographer in Thailand (Perron 2008). His performance-making process refers to modernism according to Ramsey Burt's understanding, that it "is not a direct aesthetic of positivist ideologies of progress but a progressive deconstruction of outmoded aesthetic conventions and tradition" (15).

The objective that he continued to carry on from his first solo of *Chui Chai* until enlarging the scale of diverse versions was to shift the understanding of *khon* for Thais. His solo attempted to emphasise the quality of *khon* dance rather than its tradition, forms of performance, or its mythology, which are a traditional norm in the Thai audience's perception. Baring his torso was not done because he needed to grab the audience's attention—he wanted to "bare the architectural beauty of the movement itself" (O'Connell 2010). Klunchun does not believe that the origins or authenticity of *khon* performance still continue to appear in the present time. Because this art form has been developed and hybridised for several hundred years. As a *khon* dance practitioner, he emphasises the qualities of dance and how to develop this dance performance. Therefore, he has tried to constitute his scientific knowledge and develop his own theory of dance movement. Klunchun arrests, today, if we ask Thai people about their perception and knowledge of Thai dance, they will talk the history of Thai dance rather than the principles of dance practice itself (Klunchun, Feb 2013). If you are not a practitioner, dance quality cannot be understood or explained clearly. Focusing on his solo performance in this first period of his dance development, it demonstrated how he broke the traditions of Thai classical dance in various dimensions. In addition, he gained many advantages by performing and studying dance in the United States. Being

an artist of the ACC network and learning dance at UCLA led him to meet Eko Supriyanto (Indonesia) and Sophiline Cheam Shapiro (Cambodia). These internationally-remarkable performers and pioneering, innovative choreographers became his colleagues in many projects later. As a result, he has acknowledged them at many international dance festivals, workshops, and symposia. They provided him with new connections and opportunities to continue his dance profession.

## **2.7 Resignation from the University to Be a Dance Artist**

After coming back from the United States in 2003, he was interviewed by *DNA* magazine. The interview involved the contents of his artistic life and his career as a Thai dance teacher. He was interviewed about his Thai classical dance training and studying dance abroad. However, one of his dance photographs, which appeared in the magazine, created a crucial problem for him. It was a nude dance photo, which was criticised between art and pornography (Figure 2.5). This problematic issue was more difficult than he could handle and it had a strong impact on his work as a lecturer. At that moment, the contradiction between being a university lecturer and being a professional dance artist was questioned and commented on because his nude dance photo became a debated issue regarding the professional ethics of a teacher. This issue and improper appearances both as a teacher and Thai dance artist became a source of conflict and confrontation. His scandalous photograph, additionally, became a local political issue in his workplace. The Dean of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at that time proposed

this issue to be considered at the Faculty Board. His nude-dance picture was excoriated publicly by being posted throughout the campus. Whether the consideration of the committee was appropriate or not, he was pilloried completely in the community. Ultimately, the judgement was that he should be suspended from work for the university (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

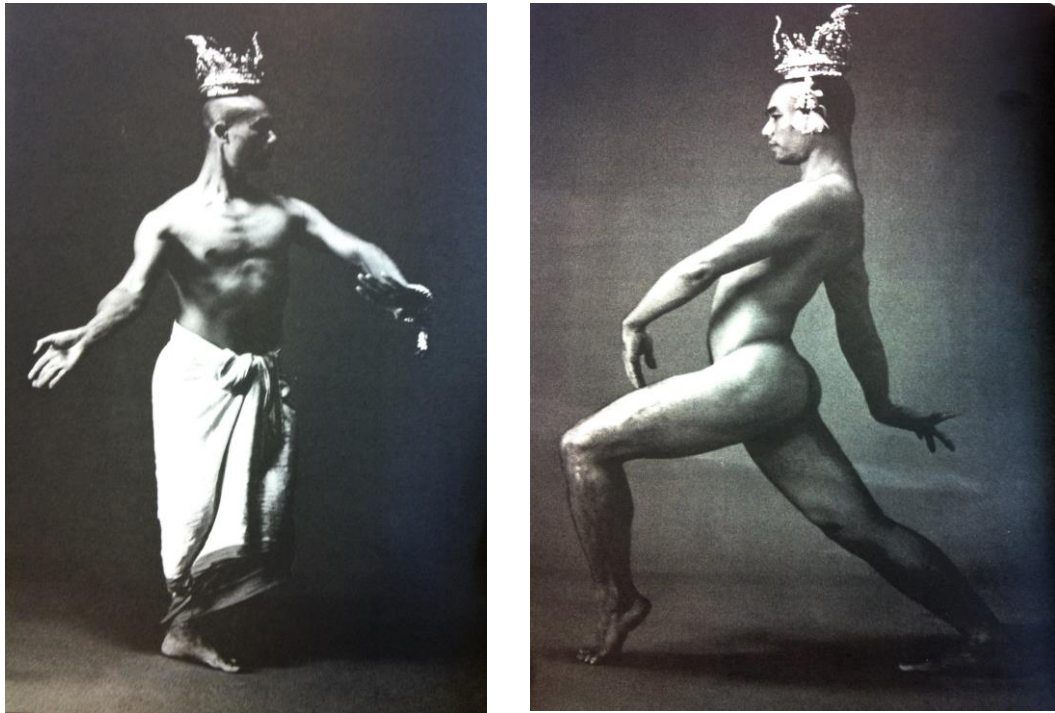


Figure 2.5 Photos of Pichet Klunchun in DNA magazine

Being a moral teacher, art lecturer and artist were questioned in his mind. Many inquiries were raised such as the rights of an artist to express his/her opinion: what is the preferable image of art teachers in Thailand as a dance artist-scholar; what are the borders of artistic freedom of expression; what are the boundaries of a scholar-practitioner in dance and the theatre field in Thailand; and how to push the boundaries of artistic expression for dance artists and dance lecturers? The

issues of beauty and nudity in dance art are very delicate and argumentative in Thai society. As a result of Klunchun's photos, the faculty members of university that he worked for picked up this issue to discuss and consider Klunchun's attitude and action. Klunchun, however, still felt sceptical and doubted with the faculty board's judgment. In fact, the Dean of faculty teaching in the Visual Arts Programme had to more profoundly understand the nude in art rather than common people or lecturers in other fields. Klunchun declared that if he taught moral philosophy, religious or even secondary school, he would not feel strange at all. He pointed out that his picture was not naked or obscene. It was his intention to have pictures taken in a nude style because many acclaimed dancers across the globe regularly do it. In addition, he thought that his purpose of in being interviewed and his perspectives about Thai performing arts in the magazine were very clear in terms of his intention to challenge the readers about Thai Dance (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

A consequence of Thai classical dance, which has its roots in court performance, was that most of its history paid attention to glorifying the monarchy, although after the democratic revolution in 1932, Thai performing arts were transferred from the property of the Royal court belonging to the Thai government. However, this art form has adhered to the discourse and traditional paradigm of "nationalism" conducted by the government. Thai classical dance, so-called "*Natasin Thai*", was defined as "high art", "national heritage" and "national identity", which needed to be conserved. Among classical artists in Thailand, Thai dance was acknowledged as sacred knowledge. This idea is reflected and reinforced

through the Wai Khru ceremony in particular. Through this ceremony, Thai dance students highly respect for his/her dance masters. This kind of ritual and its traditions have emerged and expanded in many Thai communities wherever there is a person recognised as a teacher. In the world of classical Thai dance, the strict relationship between student/disciple and teacher has been embedded into the dance traditions and its practices. Focusing on the religious aspects, three kinds of religions—Hinduism, Buddhism and indigenous belief—are blended as the religious syncretism throughout this dance ceremony. The students/disciples pay their respect to three ranks of a master: the living master, the past (dead) master, and the divine master (the Hindu and Buddhist deities/supernatural beings). These sacred images of the master have been used to transmit the sacred knowledge of dance. Some *Na Phat's* songs and choreographies were created especially for inviting the deities to join the ceremony. The traditions of using *Na Phat's* song were embedded in the performance tradition for a long time. Given this perspective, it is difficult to change the respected image of classical Thai dance in a short period of time.

Klunchun's actions and expressions perhaps impacted and destroyed the good images and beliefs of traditionalists in the country. Not only the moral image of the teacher was discredited but also the sacred knowledge and traditions of Thai dance could be demolished as well. Under the influence of modernisation in these days, however, the conventional perception that the master has inherited knowledge and special power is gradually fading away. Klunchun points out that the new generation of classical artists and the audiences need to distinguish



between “belief” and “reality” (Klunchun, Feb 2013). In his aspect, both traditional and contemporary performances have to be criticised rationally and publicly. He believes that sharing experience, attitudes even criticisms can help the developing of Thai dance scene.

This incident demonstrates that most Thai people do not fully accept that one person can have multiple identities. Having diverse identities is common in the global society nowadays; one person can have multiple roles and identities as a father, son, teacher, student, master or dance artist simultaneously. As a dancer, the body and its movements are instruments for his/her performance and expression. The dancers can utilise their own dancing bodies to voice and convey their thoughts and artistic expressions, including their identities, through dance work. Whether wearing less clothing to perform or having a photo taken as a nude dance figure—they are individual satisfactions and expressions of the performer in expressing his or her own ideas in the arts. His performances showed the expression of his ideas, his identity, developing a sense of self and a sense of relationship between him and his society. These views were reflected in many of Klunchun’s interviews. He often compared a Thai dancer with artists in other art fields. For example, on the issue of why Thai dancers cannot create their own work while visual artists can create their own art works from many kinds of materials and perspectives, Klunchun states “Thai dance has any special element which became taboo. If it has prohibition to change, it must be able to explain” (cited in Jungwiwattanaporn 38).

As a result of many troubles and pressures from the university, he decided to submit his resignation. The president of the university at that time asked him to revisit his resignation because it was a prestigious career to be employed as a university lecturer in the last generation of Thai government officers. The traditional values and perspectives of Thais prefer someone in their family to be a bureaucrat or civil servant. Before the political change to democracy in 1932, Thai bureaucracy and the civil service system were involved with Thai feudalism. Thus the first generation of Thai bureaucrats were royalist elites. As a consequence, Thais have taught their children that being a bureaucrat or a graduate would make them superior. If you are a performer or a teacher in the performing arts field, you should work or be an officer in a government agency because these professionals are honoured and their incomes are guaranteed. Nevertheless, the Dean of Fine Arts Faculty signed his letter of resignation. Klunchun, therefore, had to leave unexpectedly.

Klunchun decided to work as a dance artist and choreographer because he realised that this career did not exist in Thai society. On the other hand, there were careers for Thai dance teachers instead of Thai dancers. In his viewpoint, dance teachers do not invent or create new dance works; they merely get paid for their dance teaching (Belarmino, Interview). Hence, the dance students have a lack of role models to set a good example of dance artist and a lack of occupational choices in dance. Therefore, being dance teacher is sustainable than being a stage dancer for Thais. As a consequence, Klunchun quit being a dance teacher at

university and became a dance artist. This established an alternative career and encouraged dance students, which never happened in the past.

Klunchun's case demonstrates that most Thai people tend to view and accept a fixed image of the Thai dance teacher. "*Natasin Thai*" (Thai dance) and the teacher's image are standardised by the national institutions and the state, with a lack of diversity in its appearance and identity. In Thai society, *Natasin Thai* has been represented as the national identity. Jungwiwattanaporn asserts that the standard form of Thai performing arts in the Fine Arts Department (FDA) are upheld its artistic value as cultural heritage of the nation, while the representation of minorities, folk, and regional performance forms are ignored (Jungwiwattanaporn, *Pichet* 95). As a result, the centralisation of aesthetic standards of Thai performing arts conducted by FDA under the government has embodied and emphasised the art according to the court's standards. The sacredness of dance, the myth of *Ramakien*, and the glorifying of the Thai monarchy have harmonised and become deeply rooted beliefs among Thais. Since these beliefs have been reinforced continuously through the Thai media, Thai dance has been monopolised in terms of the aesthetics of performing arts at present. National standards for the performing arts has been substantially criticised in terms of new methods and approaches to development. The development of Thai classical dance (*Natasin Thai*) has a strong relationship with traditions, myths, and social and religious beliefs, including social class and status. *Natasin Thai*, moreover, is adhered to the signifiers of these taboo subjects in Thai society, such as the monarchy, royal property, sacredness, and even governmental and

educational institutions. These factors have led to the difficulties in developing this art form without confrontation of these social rules. Focusing on the history of *Natasin Thai*, most of the historical records and data are perspectives of academics from the courts (Jungwiwattanaporn, *Pichet* 99). Through these beliefs and attachments, therefore, Thai classical dance cannot be criticised openly and directly. This perspective has made Thai dance a representative of sacredness, institutions, and cultural capitals in order to elevate a person's status and recognition. Attachment to an absolute paradigm of conservation and stereotyped images of Thai dance might be a barrier to the development of dance itself.

## Chapter 3

### The Pichet Klunchun Dance Company and its Creations

#### 3.1 Life Work Company

The second period in the development of Klunchun's dance works was between 2004 and 2008. He developed his reputation building upon the acclaim he had accumulated through participating and performing with various international artists on world theatrical stages. Both his solo performances and collaborative works have been acknowledged and criticised by global dance critics and reviewers. His contemporary Thai dance styles developed unexpectedly over the first period, from 1998 to 2003. During this second phase, he endeavoured to establish his own dance troupe in Thailand in order to produce more group dance choreographies.

In 2002, he returned to teach a *khon* dance workshop for the Moradokmai Theatre Troupe.<sup>37</sup> In the class, some of his dance students who were trainees at the theatre troupe became enthusiastic about and interested in *khon* dance training. Klunchun also foresaw a possibility of establishing a dance company. Therefore, he persuaded some learners to gather into a group. As a consequence of his persuasion and direction, Life Work Company was established in 2002. At

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<sup>37</sup> See footnote 21 in Chapter 2.

the time, Sunon Wachirawarakarn<sup>38</sup> and Julaluck Eakwattanapun<sup>39</sup>, who had previously worked with Klunchun, became the co-founders of Life Work Company. Although it was renamed as the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company in 2009, these two permanent members have remained permanent dancers there and crucial mechanisms for developing the new company. The objectives of Life Work Company at the time exhibited Klunchun's endeavour to extend the scope and definition of Thai dance performance. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Thai are my own. Klunchun explained in the following:

To develop the knowledge of Thai dance which is a universal language both in terms of the art form itself and its performances.

To change the perspectives and attitudes of today's audiences, which often have negative viewpoints on Thai dance, both in terms of faith and pride.

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<sup>38</sup> Sunon Wachirawarakarn graduated from the journalism program at Rangsit University. He is a principal member of the Pichet Khunchun Dance Company. He was trained in khon dance with Klunchun and has had many theatrical experiences, especially with the Moradokmai Theatre Troupe. In 2011 he received a six-month grant from the Asian Cultural Council to participate in the International Choreographers Residency Program at the American Dance Festival. Later he joined the Bates Dance Festival in Lewiston, Maine in order to take classes and explore contemporary dance in New York City. After coming back from the USA, he created and performed his debut solo dance work *Home* (2012) in Thailand. In the same year, this production brought him the best performance by a male artist award granted by the International Association of Theatre Critics (IATC) of Thailand.

<sup>39</sup> Julaluck Eakwattanapun graduated with a B.A. in dance at Srinakharinwirot University and also holds an M.A. Degree in Art and Cultural Administration from Burapha University. She has been a dancer with the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company since its inception in 2004, featuring regularly in the Bangkok Theatre Festival and Burapha Music and Performing Arts Festival. At present she is a dance lecturer in the Department of Music and Performing Arts, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Burapha University.

To be a connection between the real world and today's traditional beliefs and to synchronise these.

To develop human potential in term of the physical, mental and imagination after training as a professional in the world of international art (I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA 3).

Klunchun needed to elevate the Thai dance standards to be of an international standard. He therefore introduced his ground-breaking work, entitled I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA (2004), to be the first performance of Life Work Company.

### **3.2 I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA (2004)**

*I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004) was based on a previously-created solo work, similarly named *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA*, which had been staged in many dance festivals<sup>40</sup> starting in 2003. After establishing the company, Klunchun reworked his solo and enlarged the scale of the performance into a group choreography. In January 2004, the show premiered at a small hall at the Thai Cultural Centre in Bangkok and continued the tour to Chang Mai as well. *Itappajjayata* is a shortened version of the Pali expression “*Itappajjayata-Paticcasamuppada*.” It literally means dependent arising or dependent origination. This is one of the central concepts of Buddhism and is the natural law of causes and effects. Thai Buddhist expert Venerable Buddhadasa Bhikkhu interpreted *Paticcasamuppada*, the doctrine of

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<sup>40</sup> The dance festivals as such the Asia Contemporary Dance Festival in Osaka, Japan, Asia Dreams program: a part of the Images of Asia festival in Denmark, and the New Dance Theatre SEA program named the Asia Pacific (traditional) Art Forum (APTAF II) in Taipei, Taiwan.

dependent origination, by referring to the original source in the Pali suttas. He states that this philosophy is actually a comprehensive analysis of the beginning and ending of suffering. The suffering will cease when “Right Mindfulness and Wisdom can subjugate the Six Roots (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind)” (Bhikkhu, “*Paticcasamuppada*” 1). In the programme of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004), this word was subtitled as follows: “there are motifs and elements for everything, as there are those for nothing” (*I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* 5). This Buddhist teaching-based theme was expanded into a more profound meaning: “all things are born out of cause and reason, and can be restrained through ‘Cause’ and ‘Reason’ (Effect) as well” (*I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* 5). Even though this Buddhist doctrine might be difficult for laymen or general audiences to understand, they can appreciate the fantastic beauty of each theatrical element that combined the diverse kinds of art forms in the show. As the first performance of Lifework Company, Klunchun would like to break down barriers of tradition especially in terms of Thai classical form of performance. He challenged his audience by using an abstract and experimental form of performance while most of Thai stage performances has continued strongly in a narrative form or dramatic story telling. Not only his dance practices combining various dance disciplines, but his method of using Buddhist doctrine to be an abstract element of the show was very interested.



This movement-based performance combined Buddhist scripture and a popular Brazilian novel, *Veronica Decides to Die* (1998) by Paulo Coelho,<sup>41</sup> to create a new storyline and sequences of performance. Klunchun appropriated the character of Phaya Chattan<sup>42</sup> as the narrator of *Veronica*. Indeed, the storyline was complicated for the audience because Buddhist philosophy, the character of Phaya Chattan, and the story of *Veronica Decides to Die* were totally unconnected. The story of Phaya Chattan is a modernised Jataka tale about an incarnation of the Buddha while *Veronica Decides to Die* is a modern novel representing the story of a suicidal woman. These fragmental materials were linked to create his dance plot by disregarding their original contexts. This process indicated that he drew upon “postmodernist” idea in his art works.

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<sup>41</sup> Paulo Coelho’s novel *Veronica Decides to Die* is based on his experience in various mental institutions. The story tells about a woman, the Slovenian Veronika, who lives in a mental hospital after a suicide attempt. This story was adapted into a film by Emily Yong released in 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Phaya Chattan, the mythical white elephant king, is one of Lord Buddha’s incarnations. The well-known story about him starts when his two wives are jealous of each other. His second elephant wife decides to starve herself to death. She was reincarnated as a human being. Recalling her previous life, she commanded a hunter to kill Phya Chattan. When Phya Chattan was bathing, the hunter shot him with a poison dart. The infuriated Phya Chattan wanted to kill the hunter, but he surrendered and made a sacrifice by giving his tusk instead. His sacrifice and forgiveness is the end of vengeance for the sake of another person’s happiness. This story is performed in Thai classical singing and recitation performances under the title *The Sacrifice of Phya Chattan*. For an example see the performance by Sarasas and Uaesilapa on 20 December 2012 at the small hall of TCC at the Faculty of Music of Silpakorn University, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5TrKx1x5PA>. (Web 15 SEP 2013). It is noteworthy that the story and the character of Phya Chattan were deployed in a number of Klunchun performances in the later period. Pichet adapted this story to create his solo dance *The Sacrifice of Phya Chattan* (2004, 2005). In same year, Phya Chattan’s story was developed to be a full-scale performance many times by using a pure classical masked dance movement entitled *The Bathing Ceremony of Phya Chattan* (2004).

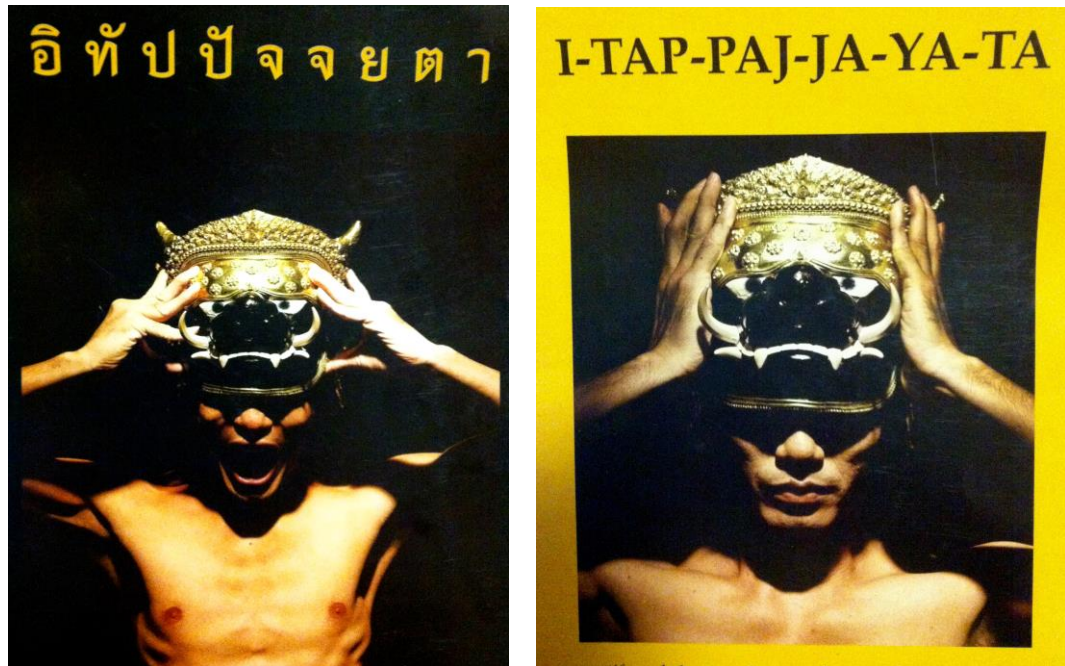


Figure 3.1 Klunchun with the experimental mask of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* as shown on the front and back cover of the *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* programme

Postmodern dance in Europe and American starting in the 1950s is a studied rebellion against modern dance. The label of postmodern can imply its meaning not only being 'after' modern dance but also 'anti' modern dance. Merce Cunningham initiated an artistic revolution and a new approach to dance in his own works during 1939 to 1945. He used a postmodern choreographic process although he came before the postmodern dance era.

By the 1950s, the postmodern choreographer, Merce Cunningham, rejects the idea that a dance has to hold a theme and storyline. Therefore, his emphasis on movement was a primary point for dance rather than using it to portray the story.

Banes (6) wrote that Cunningham's ideology holds the following beliefs:

- 1) any movement can be material for a dance;
- 2) any procedure can be followed all used as a compositional method;
- 3) any part of the

body can be used (subject to nature's limitations); 4) music, costumes, decor, lighting and dancing have their own separate logics and identities; 5) any dancer in the company can be a soloist; 6) any space might be danced in; 7) dancing can be about anything, but is fundamentally and primarily about the human body and its movements, beginning with walking.

For these reasons, Banes and Carroll assert that Cunningham belongs inside the category of the *postmodern* rather than outside it" (49-50). Through postmodern philosophy, the dance works of these choreographers were recognised as "abstract" and became a part of the "avant-garde," which represented them as pioneers in a new or unconventional movement (Ambrosio 65).

Nick Kaye argues that "the postmodern must occur as an anti-foundational disruption of precisely the move towards category and definition that a general or prescriptive account of the 'forms' and 'meanings' of postmodern art would produce" (3). A new generation of dancers attempted to create their own choreographies, going in other different directions far away from their choreographers or dance teachers. The new choreography of the post modern is not related to dramatic or realistic presentation as its predecessors has been. Some dance artists eradicated the idea of theme and storyline. Movement became a key factor, emphasised over theme or narrative dance form.

The postmodern dance style and dance genealogy of the West discussed above does not follow the same pathway as Klunchun. Klunchun does not react against modern art; the development and chronicle of dance in Thailand can be

studied, but no scholar has yet pinpointed the modern era or characteristics of modern dance on the Thai dance scene precisely. Rather, Klunchun drew upon the theoretical term of postmodernism as propounded in critical interpretation of culture and art in cultural studies rather than using postmodern dance as a style of western concert dance form. *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* was identified as a “Post Modern Dance” performance in the programme in a manner that owes little to Merce Cunningham or his followers. The concept of “postmodern” was briefly summarised in short sentences to express key issues, for instance:

-Postmodernist asserts, that “a man cannot reach things because human beings need to look and to think through language”.

Everything can be a free space where we can put our faiths and ideas into it.

-Postmodernism rejects “an absolute truth” which does not exist but we can consider a truth from multiple perspectives.

-Postmodernism rejects “concept of power, school of thoughts, conventions, classification of arts, centralisation, unity, structures, rules and sequences, even history and nostalgia.”

-Culture should not be monopolised by nobilities and intellectuals; locals and laypeople are able to have culture, artistic tastes and aesthetics of their own” [my translation] (*I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* 3).

With these explanations, we are prompted to consider the question, ‘What is postmodernism?’ As already noted, it is difficult to identify or summarise the absolute meaning of postmodern or postmodernism into one clear sentence.

According to Kaye, postmodern is unable to be exactly recognised with specific forms or figures because it “occurs as a displacement and subversion of the very terms of which it would seem to consist” (17). This confusing and overlapping terminology was further clarified by Hassan’s notion, cited in Whitmore, as follows:

Postmodernism is difficult to define precisely... because it is usually contrasted with either modernism or the avant-garde. Thus some critics mean by postmodernism what others call avant-gardism, while others still would call the same phenomenon simply modernism (Hassan, in Whitmore 3).

Postmodernism is adaptable, fluid, or unsolidified depending on one point of view. Klunchun’s use of “postmodern” is a tactic to comment on and parody the beliefs of traditional forms of art. In his dance piece, he devised diverse kinds of art forms rather than following one rigid form of “classical” or “traditional” art. Thai and multiple western art forms such as dance, music, chanting and singing, masks and visualisation of *mise en scène* were intermixed heterogeneously. These variegated elements cannot identify with a conventional genre of performance from the past. Fredric Jameson remarked as follows in this connection:

Indeed, when we make some initial inventory of the varied cultural artifacts that might plausibly be characterized as postmodern, the temptation is strong to seek the ‘family resemblance’ of such heterogeneous styles and products not in themselves but in some common high modernist impulse and aesthetic against which they all, in one way or another, stand in reaction (55).

The programme of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* argues that the culture of Thai dance should not be monopolised by nobilities, intellectuals or government institutions or the creativity and voice of contemporary artists will be limited and the art form will not be developed to serve society.

In *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA*, Klunchun attempted to include professionals and experts from various disciplines of the performing arts field. Anutep Poiprasat<sup>43</sup> (the artistic director), Sinnapa Sarasas<sup>44</sup> (the composer) and Sanchai Uaesilapa<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Anutep Poiprasat graduated with a B.A. major in Thai painting and a minor in sculpture at the POH-CHANG Academy of Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Rattanakosin. He met and worked with Pichet Klunchun for the first time at the Opening Ceremony of the 13<sup>th</sup> Asian Games in Bangkok in 1998 as the artistic prop designer of the show. Afterwards Klunchun invited him to be a mask and costume designer for the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company, in particular productions such as *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004) and *Black and White* (2011). At the present he is a renowned artist and instructor in Thai arts and painting.

<sup>44</sup> Sinnapa Sarasas graduated with a bachelor degree from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. She furthered her piano study with Mme. Nicole Rolet at the Scola Cantorum Ecole de Musique et d'Art Dramatique in Paris, France, for a Superior Diploma (Master Degree) in Piano Performance. She has worked as an award-winning composer, producer and sound designer in many commercial advertisements, TV drama series, documentary and feature films including several stage performances. In 2001, she founded a small performance troupe named "TRACKS" with Pichet Klunchun and Apisit Wongchot. These well-trained artists have created and experimented with a mixture of Thai and western art of music in order to be an alternative way of preserving the Thai arts of music and dance in the modern world. She met and worked with Klunchun at The Opening and Closing Shows for 13<sup>th</sup> Asian Games and following collaborated on many stage performances such as *The River of Kings* (1999), *Lui Fire* (2000), *Chui Chai* (2002) and so forth until the present.

<sup>45</sup> Sanchai Uaesilapa completed his bachelor's degree in Music Education with a major in Singing Classical Thai Songs and continued with a M.F.A. degree in ethnomusicology at Srinakarinwirot University, Bangkok. He became a young master in classical Thai music in the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Burapha University, where he now is also the Dean, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts. Sanchai's interest in classical Thai music has not kept him from doing contemporary work as well. He also trained in drama and Thai classical dance. He has worked with contemporary Thai music composers such as Sinnapa Sarasas, renowned choreographers and dancers such as Pichet Klunchun, and has been

(the Thai classical singer) were invited to collaborate on his creative process of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA*. It is not unsurprising that this dance work became an innovative performance at that time. Because these Thai collaborators have very high potential in their own artistic fields of contemporary performing art, they have been able to make new creations. It can be assumed that Klunchun drew upon his collaborative experiences with a multiplicity of international artists, in particular in a variety of creative collaborations with Ong Keng Sen's projects such as the *Flying Circus Project* (2000), *Search: Hamlet* (2002), and *The Global Soul* (2003). These theatrical experiences became a guideline of Klunchun's performance making. He knew how to facilitate and deal with his own collaborators from diverse disciplines.

Ong Keng Sen has been interested in developing ideas of cross-cultural work. "He is known for his rejection of authenticity and his embracing of multiple realities and hybridity within Asia" (Theatre Works, Program 13). Most of his projects focus on the exchange between concepts of traditional and contemporary arts practice. In the flier for the *Flying Circus Project* his creative process is expressed:

This multi-disciplinary, long-term research and development program in theatre...looks at the different creative strategies of individual artists, both traditional and contemporary, through the

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involved in international work in contemporary arts using older resources with Pornrat Damrhung and Bhanbassa Thuepthien from the Department of Dramatic Arts at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok.

recognition of differences between the many Asian cultures (Theatre Works, flier).

This expresses the creative process in which the director attempts to assist the participants rather than control the aspects of production. As a result of this, Klunchun regarded the three artists of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* as collaborators, and he provided the concepts of the show to them for innovating and negotiating to express their own crafts. These three artists have gradually developed their work and have continued to participate in many performance-making projects with Klunchun until the present day. As such, Sarasas composed contemporary Thai and western music for *The Bathe Ceremony of Phya Chattan* (2004), *The Sacrifice of Phya Chattan* (2004, 2005), and *Chui Chai* (2010), while Uaesilapa used his voice to chant, sing, and narrate these stories. Poiprasat was the artistic director of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004) and was a mask and costume designer in *Black and White* (2011).

As a consequence of his talented artist collaborators, Klunchun has been able to extend the use of *khon* movement in other directions. On the other hand, except for Klunchun, the seven dancers<sup>46</sup> who are in the ensemble of the production have never had professional dance experiences as classical or contemporary dancers. However, this was a good opportunity for his *khon* dance students to gain dance experience after hard training with him in the Moradokmai Theatre Troupe. As a result of this training and performing in *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-*

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<sup>46</sup> The performers were consisted of Montakan Ransibrahmanakul, Ongkarak Hiranjalearn, Chanyasorn Hongthong, Pornpan Akarakajornrit, Siriwilai Jarupran, Uaekan Numprasopsuk and Sunon Wachirawarakarn (*I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* 7).



TA, Sunon Wachirawarakarn, one of the trainees in this theatre troupe, changed himself from being only an actor to becoming a dance performer. His innovative *khon* dancing challenged the traditional dance contexts at that time. In *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* it can be argued that Klunchun employed the characteristics of postmodernism to create his identity. As such his rebellion against orthodox practices and rejection of the traditional beliefs in Thai culture were alternative ways of being a groundbreaker in Thai dance. His innovative dances are a “symptom of cultural mutation” (Jameson 64).

*I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* begins with Sanchai Uasilpa, the Thai classical vocalist, chanting a traditional *khon* style of recitation to introduce Phaya Chattan on stage. The white-powdered ensemble moves with a smooth continuous motion across the stage in their white costumes. Their appearance is like a *butoh* dance. The mise-en-scène of this production expresses a sense of minimalism. The white stage had different levels and composition. The upstage was elevated and slightly tilted to the right and was decorated with a standing tree at the end. The other side, downstage left, was covered with bright flower petals. Noticeably Pichet’s choreography was influenced by and appropriated the appearances and expressive feeling of the stylised movement of Japanese *butoh* and modern dance forms. However, his strong point is still the classic art of *Khon* masked dance and its movement, which remained at the core. The choreography employed slow-motion *khon* dancing to shape the fundamental movement, particularly for the ensemble. The appropriation of *butoh* and modern dance styles was exploited in the free movements in Klunchun’s solo. Spotlighting his solo, he superbly

performed and controlled his body alignment between the different dynamics and expressive dance forms. The distorted movements were exploited to express the mind of Veronica, and the objectives and inner feeling of the character were conveyed through expressing feeling, as in the modern dance style.



Figure 3.2. Scenography and costume design in *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA*

In Figure 3.2, Klunchun (middle) holds the mask of *Phya Chattan* surrounded by golden-black Mara masks performed by his *khon* students. The idea of movement was inspired and adopted from various dance styles. However, Klunchun did not follow those dance conventions; these movements were totally explored as materials to develop unconventional movement as the postmodernists do. Although many of the *khon* movements and gestures had specific meaning within their own traditional dance context, those meanings were removed in his

appropriation process. The gesticulating of the *khon* movements or dance language was detached but the abstract movements of its basic dance patterns were still blended in the choreography. Klunchun focuses on how to use Thai dance movements to be a universal language rather than the codes and language of national dance, which can be readable for some dance experts.

This way of dance making corresponds (perhaps accidentally) with Cunningham's idea of "movement for movement's sake." More to the point, the compositional process of Klunchun is similar to the pastiche method in *butoh* dance, which selects among different kinds of dance techniques, popular or high-class forms, with little or no regard for the original context. Therefore, the choreographers have no guilt in 'violating' their own Japanese traditional dances as a national treasure or techniques and principles. They can appropriate them without regard to their original contexts or meaning to be transformed into new vocabulary and movement patterns (Klein 21). This meaning certainly concurs with Frederic Jameson's characterisation of the postmodern as "the random cannibalization of all styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion" (*Postmodernism* 18). It could be said that Klunchun chose pastiche as one method to create his contemporary dance. His creation in this performance played an essential role in the formation of a new aesthetic in order to create a specifically "postmodern" dance movement based on Thai dance gestures. This dance style would transcend the constraints of both traditional Thai dance and western dance styles.

It was not only the *khon* dance movement that became one of the crucial elements in the production but also the contemporary design of *khon* masks took an experimental approach as well. There are seven innovative masks, all created by Anutep Poiprasat. He created the golden-black contemporary masks, which represented Mara (Demon) in the production. They were inspired by the image and story of Mara's temptation in Buddhist mural painting. Klunchun used these masks as a symbol of the Six Roots of a human being, which are the origins of suffering in Buddhist philosophy. The details of the masks will be further described in the content of the creativity regarding masks in Chapter 5. It is noticeable that many of his dance works exhibited the strong traditional appearance of *khon* identity and Thainess. He brings *khon* movement and other theatrical elements of *khon* such as the masks and the costumes, in addition to Thai classical music and singing/chanting, to be reworked and deconstructed as unique spectacles in his work.

Klunchun's uses of masks and costumes has developed through his career. During most of his performances during the first period before establishing his dance company, he presented himself as a character on stage. Although he regularly displayed his bare torso in performance, he would wear a mask or paint his body with colour. This was probably due to his *khon* training. As he said, for "a *khon* dancer who performs with the mask throughout his lifetime, taking the mask off during the performance is like being caught naked on stage" (Klunchun Feb 2013). It was difficult for him in the first stage to perform without a *khon* mask because his belief had been attached to *khon* traditions. He saw *khon* as a high

art form and culture, with the purpose of the *khon* characters and practices being to communicate the *Ramakien* story. As a result of this, he confidently portrayed himself as a *khon* character when he used *khon* movement. Therefore, he could not manifestly be himself, or use his identity and individuality on stage in his creations during the first period. For instance, in *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004) and *The Sacrifice of Phya Chattan* (2005) he continued to disguise himself as a character of Phya Chattan, painting his complexion white. In his performances in the later period he did not portray the character of the story but used himself as a character and story on the stage. As such *I Am a Demon* (2005), *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2004), and *About Khon* (2007) highlighted the story of his life and his beliefs relating to *khon*.

Consequently, the dance works of Klunchun have progressed in various directions. The innovative movement and theatrical spectacles were far from the original form and contexts of Thai classical mask dance. As the artist can adapt, experiment, and break down the most expressive theatrical elements without specific rules, his work is no longer beholden to any great extent *khon's* performance traditions or conventions. In order to create unconventional work, postmodernists regularly have rejected restrictions of traditions and formations. It is unsurprising that Klunchun's work received a lot of attention from foreign spectators rather than from local (Thai) audiences in Thailand. Since he introduced Thai dance by making exotic cultural creations for outsiders, at the same time these challenged the framework and conservative ideas of traditional Thai classical dance.

Dancing on the edge in the manner of Klunchun's contemporary work has been marketable at global dance festivals. The manner of creating exotic cultural artefacts as seen in Klunchun's strategy arguably corresponds to Graham Huggan's term "postcolonial exotic." The exoticism is ubiquitous. The exotic or "the other" artefacts fascinate transnational tourists nowadays. In the early twentieth century, European visual artists, musicians, and choreographers realized "orientalism" or "exoticism" as a reflex of the journey of individuals and troupes of Asian artists. Westerners appropriated cultural elements that were attractive to them. Today, many contemporary Asian artists use their own traditions as selling points. Sometimes selling draws upon the key word "postcolonial" to introduce transnational products. As Huggan states:

The pliability of the term 'postcolonial'—its ready availability as a market strategy— suggests that it functions not merely as a marker of anti-imperial resistance, but as a sales tag for the international commodity culture of late (twentieth-century) capitalism (24).

Huggan further explains exoticism in the following:

...exoticism become a function not of remoteness but, on the contrary, of proximity. Exotic artefacts from other culture circulate as commodities within the global economy—it is precisely their availability that renders them exotic (27).

Thai classical dance operates as an exotic commodity in order to create Klunchun's commercial packaging for international audiences. The cultural differences have been modified as objects or commodities for tourist spectacle. At

the same time, his experimental works that exploit forms or concepts of Thai traditions and cultures challenge the meaning of Thai dance. The company is acknowledged as having professional standards to serve the not only the Thai dance circuit, but also global dance platforms.

### **3.3 Pichet Klunchun Dance Company**

The third phase of the development of Klunchun's works emerged in 2009 and has continued until the present. The period starts with the setting up of the new company, which employs a group of full-time dancers. The company's vision is "to develop understanding of Thai Classical Dance at the international level"; professional full-time employment is one of the means and aims for achieving this goal (Klunchun, *Homepage*). Many Thai dancers are ranked as world-class. Unfortunately, Thailand has no truly professional dance company where these dancers can develop and continuously work on their careers. Klunchun's professional company, renamed in 2009 from Life Work Company to the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company, had as a main purpose of this rebranding to clarify the company's aims and its identity in order to achieve professional and international standards. Klunchun founded the new company and built a new small indoor theatre in his house. The theatre was entitled "Chang Theatre"<sup>47</sup>, which is similar in name to his previous theatre, Like Work Company, at the heart of Bangkok. He

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<sup>47</sup>Chang Theatre is a 20-40 seat indoor theatre, and was established in the same area of Klunchun's house. There is a rehearsal studio for creating dance works besides the theatre. This place has a very homey atmosphere as a meeting point for contemporary dance and arts performances. It is located at 700 Prachautit Road Soi 61, Tungkru, Rajaburana, Bangkok 10140.

has retained this name to commemorate and pay respect to Mr. Chang<sup>48</sup>, the pseudonym used by the anonymous patron of Life Work Company.

Klunchun's renaming the company was one of the strategic actions to construct his own identity and to create his uniqueness for the public interest. At the moment, he affirms that the company works are very self-evident. His performances do not need to be explained by critics because anyone can follow the development of his dance works over time and understand their meaning and identity by themselves (Klunchun Feb. 2013). Whoever would like to work in the company has to first understand and study Klunchun's principles of dance creation. All of the dancers in the company are required to practice and express their dance abilities through his dance theory and style.

It is unsurprising that an owner of a company will use his/her own name as the name of the company. Likewise, in the past, several Thai performance troupes preferred to use the names of possessors and supporters for the names of their dance companies. Consider Lakorn Duekdamban of Prince Narit, Likey Homhuan, Joe Louis Puppet Theatre, the Patravadi Theatre. All are examples of building personal brand identities. Klunchun mentions truly "this is my company which has no Klunchun's company 1, 2 or 3. If some dancers need to build their new troupe in the future they have to create their own identity" (Klunchun Feb 2013). With such a declaration, Klunchun proposes to push his dancers to create their own unique

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<sup>48</sup>Chang is a nickname of the anonymous supporter who dedicated the roof area of his own house to Klunchun. Thus Klunchun refurbished this space to be a rehearsal room and the theatre space of Life Work Company in 2005. *I am a Demon* (2005) was premiered as the first show of this theatre.



pieces. This idea will make the dancers progress to be professional choreographers in the future stages of their careers. If they were to imitate Klunchun's dance routine in their pieces, they would still be bound by a traditional way of learning and dance making, just like in Thai classical dance. While in the company, though, the dancers cannot be creative or innovative in terms of their own original creations. Similar to the creative process and tradition of classical Thai dance, only the dance masters can invent a new dance creation. There are no new choreographies without the advice of dance masters. The difficulty is not in the naming of the company but also in how to create an original dance product that can be memorized and understood in terms of the identity of company. Regarding another objective, Klunchun desires to employ his own name so that his dance works could be criticized in the public space. In return, the feedback and comments regarding his creative work is a way to improve his own performance as well. He attests as follows:

I want people to doubt and to question me, even to curse me, in everything that I worked. They are curious to find out, who is Pichet Klunchun? How dare he use his name as a Thai classical dance company? (Klunchun, Feb 2013).

For Klunchun, the extension of the critiques and discussions of his company and its performances can broadly bring about the development of the Thai audience in the end. Historically, Thai classical performances were diverse in terms of styles, forms, and supporters. These creators and sponsors usually employ their own names to be an identity and a trademark. On the other hand,

governmental agencies have attempted to organise the classical forms of Thai performance as a national heritage under the paradigm of conservation. This has created a “monopoly of aesthetics” in Thai society. This is because the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department, Thailand, is the only government agency with authority over performing arts across the country, especially in terms of the representation of the national identity.

Klunchun’s performance was developed through a wide range of choreographic methods of dance making. The development of his dance works has progressed in succession: from solo performances and collaborative works as a dance performer to being a director of choreographer. He has created his own dance group based on a dancer that has had Thai classical dance training while seeking dancers that can understand and cooperate with the ideas of his works. This endeavour proved to be very difficult at first because most of classical-trained Thai dancers focused on the correction and repetition of their masters’ dance choreographies rather than initiating new styles of dance works and movement. However, the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company has been able to employ five full-time professional dancers since 2011. The dancers must attend company classes and rehearse the performances every weekday. After this group of dancers was employed, he was able to compose more group dance choreography.

However, Klunchun received a great deal of contempt for the uniqueness of his dance expressions. His creative and aesthetic aspects of dance, and his acting style, which was a new perspective in Thai classical dance, are often attacked. Some say that his distinctive talent and personal charisma are things that

other dancers cannot portray or emulate and that he cannot convey or pass on his knowledge, theory and approach to other *khon*-dancers. Contesting this, Klunchun attempts to prove his theory and dance style through his own creative performance in order to transform traditional Thai dance to contemporary dance. He affirms “my dance works demonstrate that I can train the company members to employ my own dance approach in order to make the new particular dance model which I want especially in *Black and White* performance” (Klunchun Feb 2013).

### **3.4 Nijinsky Siam (2010)**

One of the distinguished productions of the company is *Nijinsky Siam*<sup>49</sup> (2010), which is a co-production between the Singapore Arts Festival and the *Theater der Welt* 2010. Klunchun created this dance work based on research on *Danse Siamoise*, a 1910 dance work performed by Vaslav Nijinsky.<sup>50</sup> The original

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<sup>49</sup> Its world premiere was held at the Singapore Arts Festival 2010 and it continued to perform at the *Theater der Welt* 2010, Germany, for its European premiere. Moreover, Zürcher Theater Spektakel and Noorderzon/Grand Theatre Groningen supported their performances in various dance programmes in Europe, such as the Theater Der Welt 2010 (Germany), The Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival 2010 (Netherlands), the MLADI LEVI Festival (Slovenia), the Zuricher Theater Spektakel (Switzerland), and the iDANS International Contemporary Dance and Performance Festival (Turkey) consecutively.

<sup>50</sup> Vaslav Nijinsky (1890-1953) was born in the Ukraine. He is a Russian ballet dancer and choreographer of Polish descent. In 1908, he completed the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg with honours. Later in a few months he was the leading ballet dancer on the stage of the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg. After he met Sergei Diaghilev in the summer of 1909, Nijinsky performed the lead role with a group of Russian dancers to Paris in the Fokine ballets. The European audience paid attention to the Diaghilev Ballets Russes, and Diaghilev encouraged him to make his first attempt to choreograph in *L'après-midi d'un Faune* (1912). Many of his choreographies also were controversial and broke the models of classic ballet, such as *Jeux* (1912) and *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) (Reynolds and McCormick 54-57).

impulse of *Nijinsky Siam* was started by a meeting with Philippe de Lustrac, a French researcher who had questioned Nijinsky's poses in *Danse Siamoise*. Lustrac showed photographs of and research on Nijinsky's *Danse Siamoise* and asked Klunchun to link these pictures to form a living movement. After his experimentation in Nijinsky's movements, the journey and dialogue between Klunchun and Nijinsky was sparked. Nijinsky's rendition of *Danse Siamoise* is a significant archival document for the history of Thai classical dance. It exhibited how foreign choreographer appropriated and created Thai classical dance from their point of view. For Klunchun, the main objective of *Nijinsky Siam* Project was "to learn about how he [Nijinsky] created what he did in *Danse Siamoise*" (Klunchun in Kuknt-Saptodewo and et al 2013).



Figure 3.3 Pichet Klunchun's post show talk on *Nijinsky Siam* on 1 Sep. 2012 at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

*Danse Siamoise* was choreographed by Michel Fokine<sup>51</sup> as a part of a divertissement under the title *Les Orientales*. Nijinsky appeared in two dance parts of *Les Orientales* performance—*Danse Siamoise*, with music by Chistain Sinding, and *Kobold*, with music by Grieg orchestrated by Stravinsky. These were mounted at the Maryinsky on February 20, 1910. The other three numbers of the divertissement *Les Orientales* were *Dance Orientale*, performed by Tamara Kasavina; an Oriental-style *pas de deux* danced by Vasily Geltzer and Alexander Volinine; and a work with the whole ensemble (Nijinska 302). *Les Orientales* was premiered on June 25, 1910 at the Theatre National L'Opera De Paris. Fokine had simply displayed some example steps and then left the rendition to the artist for creating the choreography. Therefore, Nijinsky performed both of these dances based on his own artistic interpretation (Nijinska 301-2). Nijinsky's costume and his appearance in *Danse Siamoise* were depicted by Krasovskaya as follows:

A figure looking like the statue of an ancient oriental gold in the midst of the empty space, but the statue was too small for such a big space.

A golden *kazakin*, pink *sharovary* down to the knees, blue stockings, and a tassel of green silk hanging from a golden cap onto be-rouged

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<sup>51</sup> Michel Fokine (1880-1942), Russian choreographer, is known as the father of twentieth-century ballet. His works were a bridge between the great ballet of the Russian tradition and the innovative and surprising world of modern dance oftentimes. He completed the Imperial School in 1898 emphasizing the Russian ballet techniques and tradition of Marius Petipa, who famed Maryinsky Ballet. In 1990 Diaghilev invited him to be a choreographer of the Ballet Russes in Paris. Many of the successful works for the Ballet Russ were *The Firebird* (1910), *Le Spectre de la Rose* (1911) and *Petrouchka* (1912) (Reynolds and McCormick 46-52). See further information at "Fokine, Michel", *Encyclopedia of World Biography*. 2006.<http://www.encyclopedia.com>.

cheeks began to fuse and to blaze in a game of tortuous gestures. The neck of dancer was long and stretched out; the eyes extended to his temples beneath the painted arches of his eyebrows; his lips were compressed to hide some mystery; and his fingers, bending and coiling, created a pattern as if to entwine the angular and plastic line of the slow dance (144).

This explanation of Nijinsky's appearance and gestures in *Danse Siamoise* was resurrected in Klunchun's solo dance in the second part of *Nijinsky Siam* (2010). It is believed that Fokine, the choreographer of *Danse Siamoise*, was inspired by the Boosara Mahin Siamese Theatrical Troupe (Nai But Mahin Dance Company) which visiting St. Petersburg in the 1900s (Klunchun in Kuknt-Saptodewo 207, Kolesnikov-Jessop "Walking").



Figure 3.4 A side view of the stage *Nijinsky Siam* performed by Pichet Klunchun on 1 Sep. 2012 at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Orientalist ballet was not the direct practice and real experience of westerners. It was not based on the “ethnographic knowledge of their dance forms, but rather on western imagination and fantasy” (West 12). Lozynsky argues that the most basic meaning of Orientalism is “the re-presentation of ideas about the East based not on European experience and memory but on fantasy and pre-conception” (83). Edward Said understands Orientalism as a way in which colonisers represented the colonised and also created a social hierarchy and hegemonic power over the colonised (143). As a result of western imagination and fantasy, the reality of the Orient was misrepresented. Arguably, however, ballet artists paid more attention to up-to-date entertainment and presenting star dancers than “providing aesthetic propaganda for colonialism and conquest” (West 12).

*Danse Siamoise* demonstrated the western imagination of Siamese dance through its own ballet style of choreography and the exotic costumes by borrowing some elements from classical Thai dance. As stated by Foster, “although Thailand was never colonized, it shares with other Asian countries a history of being viewed by the West as both exotic and traditional” (197). This Siamese dance indicated how Nijinsky converted Thai dance gestures into his own rendition and ballet style. Moreover, this influence of appropriation remained in some of Nijinsky’s choreographies in the following period in which Thai dance gestures were adapted for the performance. For instance, some of the softly-curving hand gestures and oddly-grasping stances of the footsteps in *Jeux* (1913) might have been developed from when “Nijinsky had seen a troupe of Siamese Dancers in St. Petersburg in 1906” (Mackrell 6).

Since Nijinsky passed away, it has been difficult to interpret the real movements and language of *Danse Sinoise*. Klunchun invited Philippe de Lustrac to be a historical researcher for the production to start his research for the *Nijinsky Siam* project. Because there was no film record of Nijinsky's *Danse Sinoise* performance, he started his creative process by investigating Nijinsky's works. At first Klunchun organised the re-creation of the performance of the Boosara Mahin dance Troupe, which supposedly influenced Fokine. Through careful research into the historical documents on Nijinsky, he then turned his focus on animation and the recreation of Nijinsky's movements (Kolesnikov-Jessop "Walking").

In the choreographic process of *Nijinsky Siam*, he questioned and analysed some of the extant photographs and Léon Bakst's paintings of Nijinsky doing this dance piece. A small number of Nijinsky's black and white pictures of *Danse Sinoise* were employed as theatrical element of the show. After Klunchun saw the photos of this iconic dancer, he questioned Nijinsky's gesticulations and costumes. These figures manifest the appropriation of the classical Thai dance form; however, those borrowed positions were not as accurate as Thai dance movement today. Moreover, he compared the structures of the dance movements and costumes between Nijinsky's *Danse Sinoise*, the existing photographs of the Boosara Mahin Siamese Theatrical Troupe, and the exotic structures of Thai architecture such as the Thai palace and the Buddhist temple. These comparisons were exhibited in the show to introduce how these creative designs were associated with each other.



Klunchun selected two musical scores for his performance. The first one was a piano trio by Sinding's *Alte Weise's* for violin and piano. This adagio music was used in the first scene to introduce Nijinsky's shadow puppet in the performance. For the last solo of *Danse Siamoise*, Klunchun chose a song from the repertoire of the *Bua Loi*<sup>52</sup> music ensemble. This ancient music uses a Javanese flute as the main music instrument. This song is very specific to special or royal funeral ceremonies. His selection of music shows that Klunchun would like to pay his respects to the heritage of Nijinsky. *Nijinsky Siam* was created to celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of *Danse Siamoise*. Sinding's score and the choreography of Nijinsky were reworked on the stage afresh by the contribution of Pichet Klunchun.

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<sup>52</sup> *Bua Loi* is the name of a Thai music style, often performed in funeral ceremonies. The music ensemble consists of Javanese flute, two Malayu drums, and a gong. This kind of music gradually disappeared from the period of King Rama V, a period contemporary with the creation of *Danse Siamoise*. At the present, there are few musicians that can play this kind of music, which is still played at particular events or royal ceremonies.



Figure 3.5 A comparison of costumes between the Boosara Mahin Dance Troupe (left) and *Danse Siamoise* (right) screening as a backdrop to *Nijinsky Siam*

Afterwards he resorted to the origin of classical Thai dance, which was a huge shadow puppet performance. As a consequence of this, the different poses of Nijinsky's *Danse Siamoise* were created as shadow puppets. These puppets became experimental materials to explore the kind of movements that Nijinsky

generated one century ago. The movements were investigated and conveyed through the slow movement of puppet manipulation in the show. Klunchun not only imitated Nijinsky's dance poses, but also invented additional dance vocabularies and transition movements to connect the different postures. The choreography of *Nijinsky Siam* (2010, 2012)<sup>53</sup> was exceptional in both content and form.

This performance began with puppeteers moving with the elaborate footsteps of Thai classical dance, manipulating the puppets of Nijinsky's images. The four main characters of *khon* are isolated under spotlights. The part of male/prince character was not performed by a dancer. There was only a spotlight on the floor while Nijinsky's images were silently projected onto the backdrop. In the first version of *Nijinsky Siam* (2010) in Singapore the female/princess character was performed by Klunchun, but for *Nijinsky Siam* (2012) in Thailand this role was portrayed by Rungsawang. Not only the cast, but also the dance story in this section was totally different. In Thailand, Klunchun chose the abduction of Sita to play. The physical language and gesticulations of *khon* dancing were staged in silence by discarding other elements from the original *khon* performance. In this way, contemporary audiences were brought to focus on the quality of the dance and its expression more than being trapped in astonishment by the *khon* theatrical components.

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<sup>53</sup> *Nijinsky Siam* (2010) was performed by Sunon Wachirawarakarn (Demon), Padung Jumpan (Monkey), and Pichet Klunchun (as Nijinsky and Princess). It was reworked in 2012, and the different cast members consisted of Kornkarn Rungsawang (Princess), Porramet Maneerat (Demon), Padung Jumpan (Monkey), and Pichet Klunchun (Nijinsky).



Figure 3.6 The first part of *Nijinsky Siam*

The last part was Klunchun's solo dance. He performed on stage as Nijinsky to portray the aesthetic of *Danse Siamoise*. In the first version of *Nijinsky Siam* (2010) in Singapore he wore a golden-red costume that was recreated from Léon Bakst's paintings. This dance used Thai classical music instead of the classical western music of Sinding. In this version Klunchun expressed the following:

At some moments the audience may feel like I'm Nijinsky since I'll be wearing a costume that's similar to his. You might say the process is like giving life back to a dinosaur, what we have now are only his fossils, and my job is to make sure that this T-Rex can run wild (Klunchun in Mahasarinand, "*Nijinsky*").

It was difficult for Klunchun to stretch his legs and to stand on his tiptoes as Nijinsky did in ballet movement style. However, in a parallel way certain hand gestures or movements in Thai classical dance are very complicated for western dancers to imitate as well. Klunchun recreated *Danse Siamoise* by using the familiar

movements in Thai dance essentially to connect Nijinsky's postures throughout the show. However, it was more interesting when Klunchun included other signature movements of Nijinsky from *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1912) in his solo deliberately.

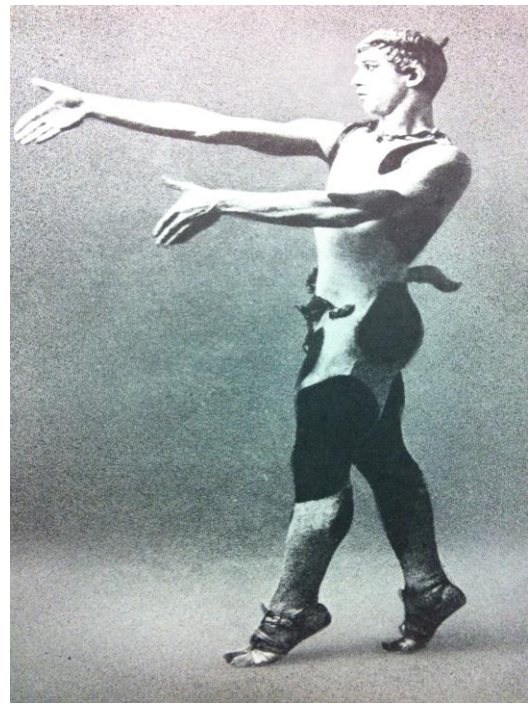


Figure 3.7 Klunchun borrowed Nijinsky's signature posture for *Nijinsky Siam* (left)  
Figure 3.8 Nijinsky' posture in *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1912) (right)

Before his solo dance was finished, a message was displayed on the backdrop: "I think I know your secrets, Monsieur Nijinsky" and the following text: "My name is Pichet Klunchun." These parody texts exhibit Klunchun's strong identity. Klunchun clarifies his attitude toward the creative process in the following:

I never wanted to recreate Nijinsky's *Danse Siamose*, but I want to make the *Danse Siamose* in my own style with the techniques I learned from Nijinsky. I want to portray the original meaning and language behind the movements that Nijinsky borrowed from Thai

classical dance, something that had been a secret for 100 years.

Nijinsky did not just pick random poses, each pose that he picked had meaning (Klunchun in Kuknt-Saptodewo and et al 205).

Klunchun did not point out how Nijinsky adopted exotic Thai dance gestures, but rather how he achieved it (Klunchun, Web *Nijinsky*). This explanation reflects his respect and understanding of Nijinsky's works—how Nijinsky selected the exotic movements of Thai classical dance to create his own solo dance. Klunchun also imitated certain Nijinsky's movement of *L'après-midi d'un faune* to blend at the end of his solo choreography. Klunchun states in his choreographer's notes as follows:

I say to Nijinsky: 'You took what was not yours, but you made it yours.' I ask him: 'Now, let us come into each other's sensation, right here on stage, so I can co-exist with you, to breathe and re-incarnate the will, the moment to transgress (Klunchun, Web *Nijinsky*).

The dialogue between two dance artists shows how contemporary dance artists can initiate new forms and content by using historical backgrounds and documents. *Nijinsky Siam* allowed Klunchun to explore and achieve other objectives beyond learning about Nijinsky's techniques in *Danse Siamose*. In this dance work he began using shadow puppets for other aspects and new creative purposes rather than merely narrating the *Ramakien* story as its original context of Thai classical puppet. In addition, through Nijinsky's works he was able to profoundly comprehend Thai classical dance by tracing it to its origin. In the end, he found the link between himself and Nijinsky. He states that "I felt some feeling



of Nijinsky; I felt the connection between him and myself during the time I performed on stage” (Klunchun in Kuknt-Saptodewo et al., 2016). This inner dialogue between Nijinsky occurred inside Klunchun’s mind in the first version of *Nijinsky Siam* (2010).



Figure 3.9 The last scene of *Nijinsky Siam* (2012)

However, in 2012, this part was reworked by means of making a model of Nijinsky on the stage (Figure 3.9). Klunchun wore a black warm-up dress for the performance. The Nijinsky model was a dead dancer and Klunchun a living dancer co-existing on the same stage. In Figure 3.9, Klunchun turned himself to the model of Nijinsky and created an imaginary dialogue with him in the last scene of *Nijinsky Siam*. The last part of this version became an argument and silent conversation between two great dancers. Vaslav Nijinsky and Pichet Klunchun finally showed how the artists challenged themselves and interacted with society through the language of dance. There were many codes of representation from ethnographic perspectives in history of Thai classical dance and of Nijinsky’s movements (Figure

3.5-3.8). These components also challenge and question the audiences that what is contemporary dance when it plays between difference dance forms and representations in same stage. *Pichet Klunchun and Myself* (2004), in the same way, focused on exposing and questioning the representational codes in order to “reaffirm notions of tradition and modernity, the local and the global” (Hardt 33-5). That is why *Nijinsky Siam* causes us to reinvestigate and experience the acts of the “reconstruction,” “reinterpretation,” and “reinvention” of cultures (Klunchun, Web *Nijinsky*).



## Chapter 4

### The Making of *Black and White*

#### 4.1 The inspiration for the choreography in *Black and White*

The *Black and White* performance was sponsored by the da:ns Festival 2011 at Esplanade –Theatres-on-the Bay in Singapore. Klunchun and his dancers were artists in residence for six weeks in Singapore to rehearse and experiment with Klunchun's innovative dance works. Klunchun's choreography was inspired by mural painting of fighting poses in the war scene related to *khon* and the Ramakien story.

*Khon* traditionally was performed in the royal court. It integrated several performance arts in order to develop its own unique style. Researchers have hypothesised that *khon* might be derived from the ancient Thai fighting amusements and ritual performances called *Sup-pha-yuth* and *Sup-pha-ki-la*. These were codified by the king and recorded in the *Kot Montien Ban*<sup>54</sup> (Palace Law) during the Ayutthaya era. *Sup-pha-yuth* may refer to fighting with weapons, also called *Krabi Krabong*<sup>55</sup>, while *Sup-pha-ki-la* denotes a fighting sport or game (Wongthes 229). Both of these ritual amusements have common characteristics, which are *Ram* (slow dance movement) and *Ten* (fast movement). The dance elements of fighting amusements were modified into many ritual performances and

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<sup>54</sup> According to a definition in the dictionary of the Royal Academy (1999), *Kot Montien Ban* refers to a special provision for the royal family and court rules governing the courts.

<sup>55</sup> *Krabi Krabong* is a weapon-based martial art of Thailand developed by the ancient Siamese warriors for fighting on the battlefield. The word refers to its two principal weapon systems, the curved sword (*krabi*) and staff (*Krabong*).

amusements in Thailand. *Khon* intermingles the acrobatic and fighting movements taken from *Krabi Krabong* and *Sup-pha-ki-la* in order to develop its dance pattern. Fighting amusements are natural behaviour of human beings based on their origins and environments in different nations and cultures (Wongthes 230-231). These were developed and related to the artistic performance of *Ram Arvut* (Weapon Dance), sometimes called *War Dance* in English. This kind of fighting performance is also known as *Weerachai* or *Krabi Krabong* in the Thai language in a later period (Pramoj 1983, Yupho 1983). According to the historical palace law, *Kot Montien Ban*, warriors performed both *Sup-pha-yuth* and *Sup-pha-ki-la* in the Siam Palace. Both art forms were adjusted in order to generate royal amusements such as “*Mong-Kroom, Ku-la-tee-mai, Ra-Beng*<sup>56</sup>” (Wongthes 232-233). The presentation style and costume of *khon*, including these three rituals dances, could have possibly come from the *Chak Nak Duekdamban* (or “The Churning of the Sea of Milk”), the royal ceremonies from historical Siam and Khmer (Damrhung 247-248, Wongthes 241, Yupho 1983). *Chak Nak Duekdamban* was used to celebrate the inauguration of the kings in the Ayutthaya era. The development of *khon* from the fighting movements of Thai amusements became a source of inspiration for Pichet Klunchun in producing his dance performance *Black and White* (2011).

The idea for *Black and White* occurred when he was researching a hundred

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<sup>56</sup> Mong-Kroom, Ku-la-tee-mai, Ra-Beng are Royal amusements. From Ayutthaya until Rattanakosin, these were performed in royal ceremonies and solely by male dancers.

of fighting *khon* postures. He stated the following:

One day when I just looked around all the images and movements. I found something in the pictures about the line. And the pictures seemed like they were moving after I looked at them for a long time. Then I thought, if the pictures could move why not the body (Klunchun, *Black and White*).

With his fantasy and imaginative image thinking, he attempted to create this kind of work some ten years ago. However, he did not achieve it because the dancers were not sufficiently strong in the *khon* dance technique at that time. After he had assembled a group of dancers and worked with them for three years this project was able to begin. The special device that Klunchun introduced in this work was to expand the two-dimensions of Thai mythic tableaux to be three-dimensional through dance creation. Moreover, he challenged the conventional ideas and perspectives of traditional *khon* as the classical dance-drama, which convey the story of Ramakien to enable *khon* dancing to become part of world dance. He has worked very hard to search for the artistry and dance quality inside the *khon* dance technique by paying less attention to its story and traditions. Embedding himself deeply in order to explore his own craft is the way that he works. He asserted that “You must understand yourself first search your own movements and techniques however you cannot understand everything about dance in this world because dance has many different forms” (Klunchun, *Black and White*).

The figures below are the mural paintings where he got his inspiration for his dance. Figure 4.1 is the war scene in Ramakien between the characters of the male human (Rama), monkey (Hanuman) and the demon characters (Introrachit and a demon warrior). This picture was the background screen in the opening of the *Black and White* show.



Figure 4.1 The mural painting of the fighting scene in Ramakien

Figure 4.1 is a battle of black and white monkeys. This fighting scene is also called *Chap Ling Hua Khum* (battle of monkeys in early evening) or *Chap Ling Kao Ling Dum* (battle of white and black monkeys). It is a tale of two monkeys performed as a prologue to the Thai shadow puppet theatre or an introductory dance performance in *khon* before the start of the main story, *Ramakien*. In traditional *khon*, it is a battle between Hanuman, the white monkey, and Nilaphat, the black one.

The moral of the story tells of the simple Buddhist doctrine, highlighting victory of good over evil. This mural painting, changed to be a black and white tableau. It was projected as the background for introducing the second part of the *Black and White* show.



Figure 4.2: The fighting between black and white monkeys

In addition, apart from the battle scenes in the paintings, Klunchun was also strongly influenced by the political conflicts in Thai society. When the Thai coup d'état took place in September 2006, there was a yearlong political crisis, which led to the polarization between two groups of people, the red and yellow shirts. This crisis has continued up to the present time. This struggle in Thai society strongly affected and motivated Klunchun to make various contemporary performances in order to reflect his voice concerning the crisis in Thai society. As he asserts in an interview, “I [Klunchun] questioned why Thai people fought or killed each other, and why they were so hungry for power. I was frustrated as to why Thai people acted like enemies to each other” (Klunchun in Belarmino,

“*Interview*”). As a consequence, he produced various productions in order to criticise the current political situation in Thai society, such as *Shoes* (2005), *The Battle of Sang Arthit* (2009), *Ganesh* (2009, 2012), and *Chui Chai* (2010). He always raised many questions and satires to criticise political issues. He stated the following:

Often, I [Klunchun] have been asked: ‘what colour are you?’ My answer is, ‘I am with righteousness’. For *Black & White*, it is this feeling that I want to talk to the Thai society and others, and that we should transform conflict to support in order to develop the country and create positive results (Klunchun in Belarmino, *Interview*).

Through this intention in *Black and White*, he tried to explore the exquisite equilibrium of opposing powers, which is inborn in the human mind. The balancing of struggle between good and evil can be a way to discover inner peace. The show was explained in the programme as follows:

In this piece, planes of perception are the driving forces to viewing compositions of dancing bodies. When does struggle become support? How does confrontation turn into acceptance? What does it take to embrace and sense rather than to resist and reject? Lauded for his daring and unconventional approach, Pichet has brought contemporary sensibilities to the Thai classical form of *Khon* while staying true to the heart and wisdom of the tradition (Klunchun, *Black and White*).

Klunchun intended to begin this performance in 2009, two years before the premiere of its performance. He discussed this project as being sponsored by Singapore's dance festival at the Esplanade Theatre. However, he did not start this project at that time because he realised that his dancers did not possess sufficient potential to execute modern khon movement. He affirmed at that time that "those dancers did not understand me [Klunchun] and my process well enough." The dancers had various techniques and styles of Thai classical dance, but below the quality demanded by Klunchun's theoretical and practical requirements (Klunchun Feb 2013).

Indeed, thinking in terms of two opposite things such as Black and White, Man and Woman, is a universal feature. For Klunchun these two contraries can connect with each other to create balance and equilibrium in human beings. At the start of his dance-making process, Klunchun designed the piece by separating two groups of male and female on the opposite sides. This composition can demonstrate a meaning of war and battlefield however he changed his opinion by saying the following:

Man and woman have been made for the balance in the natural world, which is already recognised in general. However, the meaning of 'balance' in my interpretation has changed; it is not only the perspective about opposite sexes. There are other genders and factors or others that are brought into my creative performance process. Therefore, my viewpoint about opposite sexes was cut down during the process (Klunchun Feb 2013).

His statement demonstrates how he realised and understood the contemporary world. The opposite poles of sexuality are a product of a simple and old-fashioned viewpoint. Hence, he challenged himself to change his viewpoints in some details and elements in the performance. The idea of *Black and White* sounds like the concept of *Yin-Yang*. This Chinese philosophy is used to explain how the opposite or contrary energies are interrelated with each other or interdependent in the natural world. There are many dualities, Klunchun think about regarding the concept of yin-yang, such as black and white, light and dark, fluid and static, gracefulness and vigorousness, and also life and death. In this research, *Black and White* is not only a simple duality but also about the equilibrium of life, which involves the physical, spiritual, artistic, social, political, including personal aspects.

#### **4.2 The collaborators in the dance-making process**

In the dance-making process, Klunchun invited many collaborators from outside the country to create the dance work with him. Lim How Ngean was asked to be a dance dramaturge in his production in collaboration with Wu Na, Chinese guqin musician, and Miura Asako, a Japanese lighting designer. The dramaturge is a necessary position in order to criticise and support the artist's work, particularly during work in progress. Klunchun wanted to have a dance dramaturge in his creative process. This is because the dramaturge can provide assistance and find specific information related to the work: "This position looks similar to the consulter in order to refine and clarify my dance works" (Klunchun Feb 2013). He consulted and negotiated with his dance dramaturge and treated everyone as collaborators.



As result of this, the dramaturge had no direct authority in making decisions about the choreography. This creative process is in contrast to the choreographic making of Thai dance. He attests as follows:

I never summon my teachers or ask for their comments during the developing process of my dance making. They will merely come to view my live performances on stage. The discussion and commentary of the teacher can make a state of anxiety or deference.

If you do like this you will become a student who never think out of the box all the time. This system will make you lose your identity.

(Klunchun Feb 2013).

On the other side, Klunchun has utilised his post-show talk and conversations with the real audiences to articulate and develop his dance creations. He believes that the audience member is a person that can effectively reflect on his work: “The live comments and critiques from the audience in front of you are great and important for your progression” (Klunchun 2013).

In his choreographic process, the dancers seemed to be an object of architecture or sculpture. Klunchun explored how to use the lines, motions and movements of *khon* dancing to create abstract dance rather than build specific characters into it. Some of the choreography emerged when he observed the dancer during dance exercises. In particular, the abstract moment stemmed from the fighting poses of *khon*. He created many acrobatic pyramids and catching postures in the war scene for the dancer to practice and explore. Then he selected some fighting poses and juxtaposed these to create a dance phase. The dancers

needed to create transitional movements from one pose to another. He created the dance phrase and even made it more complicated and fluid. Moreover, some dance movements sprang from his inspirations, such as some fighting postures, which did not exist in the mural paintings but emerged in the *khon* performance. At the end of each rehearsal day, he always reflected and criticised some of the dance elements to his dancers, which were either interesting or boring, to be included in the production. For a long period of time, sometimes he did not know what he was doing; he just knew what he wanted. However, but in terms of dance he did not know how or where some of the dance movements came from (Klunchun 2013). His dance creation and its movements perhaps might be a process of sharing and creativity between the choreographer and the dancers. This stage of the collaborative process reflects the idea of dance making in contemporary thought. Moreover, it is not only the process of dance making and choreography; he also looked into the visual elements. During the development of the work, he sometimes gave abnormal tasks to the dancers. For instance, he allowed them to walk or sit continuously for the whole section, or wrapped them with black plastic bags in which they danced or moved. These were experimental tasks in order to discover a strong visual image for conveying the theme of *Black and White*. One in ten exercises was selected for use on stage. In addition, Klunchun stated that some conservatives in Thailand might look down on *Black and White* because its costumes in some parts of the show have a nearly nude appearance. However, by “changing the costume to be more beautiful and traditional, this visual appearance can be acceptable and be fine for them” (Klunchun, 2013).

Moreover, in this creative process one acclaimed collaborator also needs to be mentioned, Wu Na, the Chinese guqin musician<sup>57</sup>. Klunchun met her at a dance festival in Beijing at the end of 2010. At that time, Wuna gave a music box to Klunchun as a gift. Klunchun was impressed by Wu Na's guqin music and invited her to collaborate with him as the musician for *Black and White*. Klunchun also worked hand-in-hand with her during the creative process; not only the live Chinese guqin music that she provided on stage, but also the electrical sound and voice, Chinese words, and recitation were delivered. Before Wa Na began to collaborate with him, he used the song from Wu Na's guqin music box as background music for the rehearsal. Wu Na arrived in Bangkok in June 2011. At that time, the dancers were in a period of work in progress. She played Chinese guqin every day so that they could get some feeling and sense of her music. For Wu Na, her music is not only national, but also international or world music (Wu Na, *Black and White*). Therefore, guqin music is practicable and feasible to be used with any styles and forms of dance. Likewise, *khon* dancing can also be a material for the dancer to create other art forms. Klunchun demonstrated that he is open to cooperating and working with other artists other than Thai musicians, as attested in the following:

In Thailand, all the people they just do day by day. It is impossible to work with the company in six months and change the music (for the Thai classical musician). There was no Thai musician or a music

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<sup>57</sup> See further the extract of choreography and various kinds of Wa Na's music in *Black and White* at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIRfkTLSICM>

company to collaborate for a dancer to collaborate with. That's why I did not want to work with them. Because I take 24 hours to work whilst they work for just two hours, coming and asking me which Thai music do you want (Klunchun, *Black and White*).

His statement showed that he complained not about Thai classical music but the lack of professional musicians. The self of the artist is very necessary in his collaborative process. Likewise, the traditional dancer attempts to only correct the dance routines, and how his creativity and identity developed. The big problem with the idea of traditional dancers is that Klunchun does not know who they are (Klunchun, *Black and White*). As result of this, it is difficult to find the good Thai collaborator. For Klunchun, he collaborative process is a negotiation between collaborators. As he said, "I am not a boss of the process. We are the partners to create it" (Ibid). For this reason, most Thai dance artists have no strong support from a true professional dance company in the country. Accordingly, the dancer cannot survive as a full-time dancer, and the reason for this was stated in the following:

Perhaps, Thais believe art and dance are not necessary in Thai society, and they're only just for fun and being entertainment in the restaurant or the party. That's why Thai dancers cannot survive. That's why I created the company as being a model in this career" (Klunchun, *Black and White*).

The development of contemporary performing arts in Thailand has been increased at a slow pace. This is because that has been little support from the government

or local agencies compared with fully-funded national heritages and performances. The traditional and classical performances are considered not only as related to the “national identity,” but some of them have been classified as “high art,” which required particular knowledge for appreciation. In addition, through the unstable cultural policy of the Thai government, many contemporary dance and theatre companies were overlooked as cultural products. However, these contemporary products, based on traditional performances, have increased and are now considered to serve contemporary Thai society. Still, they remain as a lower art form. Since the government intends to promote the national identity, supporting only heritage or traditional art forms has become the policy in order to get recognition from other countries as a civilized state. It is rather ironic, however, that the radical dance works of Klunchun, which reject some of the conventional practices in traditional *khon*, are also acknowledged by international dance festivals. His radical perspectives became the signature of his performances. It is unsurprising therefore that the quality and complexity of his company performances have provided the company with funding from international organisations.

In terms of funding and investment in art and culture in Thailand, *Black and White* allows us to realise the vision and cultural policy of the government. Klunchun said that Thailand is still unclear about the progress and stability of its cultural policy, especially regarding contemporary performances. Compared to the funding of *Black and White* in Singapore, it demonstrates the intelligence and accurate vision of the Singaporean art organisations. While the *Black and White* is

performing internationally from 2011 to the present, the name of Esplanade Theatre, the main sponsor of this performance gets to be promoted around the world as well. Supporting the art in Southeast Asia, both traditional and contemporary styles and forms, became a part of public relations for Esplanade. For Klunchun's company, it was a commitment in the contract with Esplanade that 20 percent of the income from each touring performance had to be paid back to the funder. However, "the supporter did not receive this amount of money; they appreciate that my [Klunchun] performance can go abroad and have great publicity" (Klunchun 2013). In fact, it is very difficult for Esplanade Theatre to co-support and to get the recognition in the other theatres in Europe. In terms of supporting Arts and Culture of Southeast Asian countries, this is a good way for promote the country indirectly. "Thailand does not have the policy to co-support a production with other countries, especially a contemporary performance piece like this. Hence, there has not been any much of new creativities in performing arts industry" (Klunchun 2013).

#### **4.3 The company dancers and their dance training**

After the political change in 1932, the constitutional monarchy was proclaimed and the Thai government controlled diverse genres of classical arts as a national heritage. Because of this, the Fine Arts Department established the College of Dramatic Arts School in 1934. Through the school curriculum, court performances and their teaching such as *khon* and *lakon* styles became under government supervision. This occurrence brought classical performances to be not only taught and performed in the court, but also extensively taught in many other

drama and dance school. At present, there are twelve branches of The College of Dramatic Arts School across the country. The school educates and trains the students not only in *khon* and *lakorn*, but also other kinds of traditional music and arts. In the choreographic process of *Black and White*, there are six dancers: Pichet Klunchun, Kornkarn Rungsawang, Noppadon Bundit, Porramet Maneerat, Jirayus Puatput, and Padung Jumpan. Except for Klunchun, all were trained in *khon* Thai classical dance in their high school level from different branches of The College of Dramatic Arts School.

Kornkarn Rungsawang completed high school level studies at The College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok, Thailand. Later, she completed a B.A. in music and performance with a major in Thai Dance and Choreography at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Burapha University. She passed the company's audition when she studied in the first year and joined *Chui Chai* (2008). Afterwards, she continued to perform in occasional productions with the company until she became a full-time dancer in *Black and White* (2011).

Noppadon Bundit was trained in Thai classical dance, focusing on the demon character of *khon* performance, at The College of Dramatic Arts, Bangkok, Thailand. Later, he studied and completed his bachelor degree in Thai Dance at The Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi. Currently, he is a government officer at Vimanmek Palace (Mansion) in Bangkok, Thailand. Since performing *khon* and stage dancing became his passion for life, he has remained a professional freelance dancer along with his main career. He has had various performance experiences with many renowned

Thai directors and choreographers, such as Patravadi Mejudhon, Naraphong Charassri, and Pichet Klunchun.

Porramet Maneerat was trained in the demon *khon* character at The Sukhothai College of Dramatic Arts. He came to study in Bangkok and graduated with a bachelor degree in Thai Dance at the Faculty of Music and Drama at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, Ministry of Culture Thailand. He joined many company performances, such as *The Battle of Sang Arthit* (2009), *Chui Chai* (2010), and *Black and White* (2011).

Jirayus Puatput was trained as the demon *khon* character at The Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts. He completed his Thai dance degree at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute. He was a classmate of Porramet Maneerat. After passing the audition for Klunchun's company, he first participated as a freelance dancer in *The Battle of Sang Arthit* (2009). He also practiced hard for the traditional *khon* style of this particular show. However, in the battle scene of the live performance, the dancers returned to stand in silence. Klunchun stopped the war scene because his purpose was to make a statement against the political crisis in the country at that time: "The different presentations and interpretations extremely changed my view of traditional *khon* performance," Puatput stated (2013). Since joining the company in various performances, he became a full-time dancer when he engaged in *Black and White* (2011).

Padung Jumpan practiced the monkey character of *khon* at The Kalasin College of Dramatic Arts and completed his Thai dance degree at Bunditpatanasilpa Institute. At first, he joined the company in *The Battle of Sang*



*Arthit* (2009) and continuously performed *Nijinsky Siam* (2010) and *Black and White* (2011).

*Khon* dancing is exquisite and expressive. The entire dancer's body is used to express and gesticulate many feelings: love, sad, shyness, anger and so forth. In ancient times, all the roles and characters in the *khon* performance were customarily performed by male dancers. The acrobatic postures and dances in *khon* have been influenced and developed by *Krabi Krabong*—the Thai traditional sword and rod. This martial art became one of the fighting practices for young princes, royal pages, and nobleman in the *khon* dancing. Some aspects of this war dance were combined into the battle scenes of *khon* dancing. For male students that decide to learn the art of *khon* performance, they need to train in specific *khon* characters according to their corporeality and suitability. The training for each character can be separated into basic and advanced conventional dance practice. Although at present women are allowed to perform the male and female characters in the *khon*, the demon and monkey roles are still often performed by male dancers.

Noppadon Bundit, Porramet Maneerat, and Jirayus Puatput were trained in the demon character, while Padung Jumpan practiced the monkey role. Since Klunchun underlined in the group choreography in the war scene of *khon*, these four male dancers were selected as the original cast for the performance. In the present author's point of view, it is not only the mask that can be a recognition of *khon* performance, but also the stylish dances and roles of the monkey and demon in *khon* as well. Focusing on and embedding in *khon* dancing are a strong

characteristic of Klunchun's company. The dance training, particularly for the demon and monkey roles, is both rigorous and monotonous. The dance practitioners have to impersonate the creative images of the demons and the gestures of the monkeys. Acrobatic skill is required for *khon* dancers, particularly for the monkey role. The monkey often stands on top of the demon character to shape an acrobatic pyramid. Many fighting *khon* postures have various kinds of acrobatic pyramid poses and the dancers have to be trained in classical Thai dance movement side by side with gymnastic techniques. It may take longer than a year to be a competent and professional *khon* dancer. These two *khon* characters and their specific dances are one of the principle materials of the show.

Kornkarn Rungsawang was trained in the male and female human characters in her childhood. Training in these characters in *khon* is quite similar to the training for the *lakon* performance because many elements of *lakon nai*—a style of all-female dance drama performing in an inner Siamese court—were integrated in *khon*. At the present time, it is not unconventional to see a woman perform male and female human roles in *khon*. The original masculine roles in some *khon* dances have been adjusted and refined with gentle and feminine movements from *lakon nai*. These two art genres are intermingled and manifesting the development of *khon rong nai*. *Khon rong nai* denotes the court *khon* or court mask play. It has an affinity with various components of the court dance dramas, such as recitatives, dialogues, and singing. On the other hand, there has no these characteristics of *lakon* performance in the original *khon* called *khon klang pleng*. *Khon klang pleng* is an outdoor masked play that emphasises the parade dance

and battle. The performance is accompanied by suitable march music, which alternates with recitatives and dialogues without singing. Hence, the training for the male and female human roles has been featured as a combination of both dance techniques and genres.

At first, Klunchun did not want a female cast member in the *Black and White*; he intended to use only male dancers in the show. After Rungsawang graduated from the university, she helped the company as an apprentice or volunteer and asked Klunchun if she could join the rehearsals in order to firm her dance body. She started to train with some basic dance steps of the demon-character with other male dancers. However, Klunchun told her that he was not sure that she could play in the production. She continued to rehearse even while she was not sure whether she would be able to play or not (Rungsawang 2013). Indeed, it was because the choreographer focused on the group choreographies of male dancers, employing the *khon* dancing to be performed by male rather than female characters in the show. In the end, she became one of the main characters and had her own solo dance and duet scenes with Klunchun in the show.

Nonetheless, Klunchun points out that the demon dance technique is the most important technique in order to develop the endurance, stability and strength of the dancer's body. The company members must do warm-up exercises with some demon dance practices, whether they are familiar with them or not. As a consequence, Klunchun initially created his own dance exercises for the company. The preliminary stage of *khon* training is concerned with warming up and stretching the muscles. There are four identical basic practices for the *khon* characters of the

monkey and demon, which consist of the following: *Tob Kao* (*tapping the knees*), *Tong Sa Ew* (knocking the waist), *Ten Sao* (steps at the pole) and *Teeb Liem* (pressing into angles) (Bridhyakorn and Yupho 10). *Tob Kao* (*tapping the knees*) is a simple practice to train the apprentice to obtain a sense of musicality and tempo. *Tong sa ew* (knocking the waist) is for preparing the upper part of the dancer's body to become flexible and muscular. *Ten Sao* (steps at the pole or post dance) is an exercise of the legs to strengthen and to adjust angular movements accurately. The *khon* trainee always bends and opens his knees outward while lowering his body all the time. Then he lifts each foot and steps the left and right feet alternately and rhythmically. This is similar to standing with bent knees outward as the second position of ballet, which is also called *Liem*. As a consequence, the performer cannot be stopped during any movement of the dance. *Teeb Liem* (pressing into angles) is a good physical training for this reason. It is to bend and maintain the body, arms, legs and breasts into fixed positions of the *khon* character. By standing for a long time and pressing the knees to open the angles, the dancer can have more muscularity and pliability. In this fundamental exercise, the students can learn how to adjust the inner muscles and dance structure of each *khon* character. Moreover, it involves persistence, concentration, and allowing it to happen in terms of performing. This practice helps the students have strong muscles and dance without feeling exhausted for a lengthy period of time. Klunchun states that the practice of *Ten Sao* includes five steps, which are persistence, acceptance, learning, practicing, and detaching. The performer must complete all of the steps with concentration until they become "second nature"

(*khon* character) (Klunchun, *Ten Sao*). This represents “the performance from a perfectly well trained person” (Ibid).

It is noticeable that Klunchun believes in dance training and rehearsing more than anything else as a way to become a professional dancer. Not only did he practice *khon* dance throughout his life, he also studied in order to understand profoundly *khon*'s roots. Most of his dance creations have a good rationale behind them, full of research and references. His idea of creative and experimental works has logical thinking. Noticeably throughout his innovative warm-up exercises, it shows how he comprehends the difference between “belief and truth” in the real world of today's *khon*. It is unsurprising therefore that his company dance exercises emphasize the basic practices of *khon*. The present author participated in the dance exercises and rehearsals several times and the company practices were observed on many occasions. It was found that the company dancers started the rehearsals with *khon* warm-up exercises developed by Pichet Klunchun, and it is very interesting to compare his warm-up exercises with both traditional *khon* practice and other dance genres such as ballet and modern dance.

First, his warm up exercise is accompanied by *Na Phat* songs, a type of sacred song in classical Thai music. Klunchun used many *Na Phat* songs to be played continuously for about 40-50 minutes during the exercise without stopping. This is totally different and better than the traditional way where warm-up is without music or is only accompanied by tapping sticks to create rhythm for the dance. In traditional *khon*, *Na Phat* songs and the specific choreographies of each song are sacred and cannot be changed. However, these choreographies were invented

form basic patterns and positions of *khon*. For Klunchun the choreographies and *Na Phat* songs are good material for the dancer. Using the dance patterns or sacred song separately can be one way to create a new choreography (Klunchun, Feb 2013). Adapting *Na Phat* songs for warm-up exercise that Klunchun did, the dancers can absorb and relate their movements with the songs and develop their musicality.

Secondly, he adapted the *Mae Tha*—mother of *khon* postures, particularly the basic gestures of demon characters and rearranged them to be his own dance routines. This innovation of *Na Phat* is unconventional if you have conservative views related to traditional *khon*. However, his warm-up routines are very well structured in terms of developing dance skills. The procedure starts with slow movement and proceeds to complicated dance steps along with *Na Phat* songs, which are continued and changed to a faster tune. At the end of the exercise, he allows the dancer to improvise and dance in free movements to Thai classical music. In this part of exercise, he not only focuses on and adapts traditional *khon* practices but also combines and allows modern movements in his practice. His innovation with warm-up exercises can be seen as progressive for today's Thai contemporary dancers. The dance routines develop many dimensions in the dancers' capacity, such as physicality, musicality, creativity, and performability. Moreover, Khunchun's improvisation exercise empowers the dancer to expand the scope of the company dance creations. He believes that "arts are about training, practicing and creative thinking, not simply memorizing and then thinking that one knows it all" (Klunchun, *Ten Sao*).

#### **4.4 *Na Phat*: the traditional *khon* choreography in *Black and White***

Because the company dancers were skillfully trained in *khon*, some of the traditional choreographies were adopted to be used in the creative process. Three traditional choreographies of *Na Phat* were selected for some sections of the performance, consisting of *Khuk Phat*, *Sa-Moe Marn*, and *Baht Sa Ku Nee*. *Na Phat* is one kind of Thai classical song. It is sacred music for *khon* and *lakorn* performance, which has different types and levels. Many *Na Phat* songs are not only used in the Wai Kru ceremony, but also those songs are used in *khon*'s play. Before being a professional *khon* dancer, the traditional dance trainee must practise all of *Na Phat*'s choreographies from the basic to the more complicated dance patterns and movements. The *khon* masters choreograph each *Na Phat* song to highlight the specific action and movement of *khon* characters. Three choreographies that Klunchun selected to be dance material were derived from the high rank of the *Na Phat* song. These high-ranking songs and their choreographies are also called *Na Phat Sung* (high instrumental music) or *Na Phat Yai* (great instrumental music). The songs in this category are considered very sacred. The participants engaging in the Wai Kru ceremony, when they hear this song, they should do a *Wai* (palms pressed together for prayer) for respect. If the trainees do not have sufficient dance skills, the master will not pass on the high level of choreography to them. If the performers do not inherit the high ranks of *Na Phat*, they will not be allowed to dance in the principal roles. In the past, the proficient performer had to dance all different kinds and ranks of the *Na Phat* song and choreography. After finishing the dialogues and recitatives, the *khon* reciter would

interpolate the name of the *Na Phat* song for the musician and the performer (including the audience). Therefore, it is a duty of the reciter to understand the *khon* dance characters of each performer (Ratnin, *Laksana* 55).

*Khuk Phat* is a high rank of *Na Phat*, which shows the supernatural power or extreme anger of the *khon* characters. The choreography of *Khuk Phat* must perform by male and demon *khon* characters. This traditional dance pattern was used by four demon characters in the first scene of the show with fully-modern *khon* costumes. Although Padung Jumpan, one of the dancers in the group, was trained in the monkey character, in this choreography he needed to adjust his body and dance routine in monkey style to become demon postures during the whole choreograph.

*The Sa-Moe song* is one kind of *Na Phat* song that expresses the action of travelling a short distance. The word *Sa-Moe* might be rooted in the Khmer language: “Tha Moe” means walk (Ratnin, *Laksana* 55). This kind of song is used to slow graceful walking or the slow movement of the *khon* characters. In *Black and White*, Klunchun selected the choreography of *Sa-Moe Marn* and *Baht Sa Ku Nee* or *Sa-Moe Teen Nok* to employ in his dance work. *Sa-Moe Marn* is a choreography that shows the action of walking of the demon *khon* characters. Porramet Maneerat and Jirayus Puatput employ this dance pattern in the middle part of the show. They walk and confront each other in the inner circle space of the stage. On the other hand, in the outer circle or periphery space the dancing between Pichet Klunchun and Kornkarn Rungsawang is presented. They applied the choreography of *Baht Sa Ku nee* or *Sa-Moe Teen Nok* in the performance. This



choreography was created particularly for high-ranking human *khon*-characters. The meaning of *Baht Sa Ku nee* (Bird feet) refers to bird-liked walking. This is very exquisite choreography denoted the graceful walking of non-ordinary or angel-liked human. It is utilised only for the god or royal *khon* characters. For instance, the regal roles—*Phra Ram (Rama)*, Avatar of the god Vishnu or *Pha Lak (Lakshaman)*, who is Rama's younger brother or other god characters in *khon*—can use this choreography to perform. However, in the ancient *khon* script the character of Tosokath (Ravana) was also used for the choreography of *Baht Sa Ku nee*. This is because Tosokath was considered a special demon *khon* character, who is the great king of Longka born into a Brahma god family (Ratnin, *Laksana* 55). While Rungsawang performs *Baht Sa Ku nee* in the dance style of the human character, Klunchun displays this dance pattern with the demon role. These opposite characters demonstrate the beauty and artistry of *khon* dancing based on the distinctions of *khon* characters.

From the present author's point of view, this creation not only manifests the differences between “black and white,” “good and evil,” or “traditional and modern,” but also the differences and similarities in the details of *khon* and its traditions, as Klunchun carefully and reasonably selected some of the specific traditional choreography of *khon* to be his material for the dance work. If the choreographies of *Na Phat* are performed without its specific song, using some *Na Phat* choreographies in this way can be acceptable. In fact, the dance poses and steps in *Na Phat* choreographies are created by combining and rearranging *Mae Tha*—basic *khon* postures. As a consequence, some dance patterns of *Na Phat* can be

outstanding routines for the choreographer. If someone uses some of the dance patterns of *Na Phat* in the performance without its own specific song, the general audience will hardly realise that it is *Na Phat* choreography; they will perceive and assume that it is Thai dance routine. In contrast, if the dancers show some specific dance patterns of each *khon* character, the expert spectators will predict and recognise some sources of the choreography.

#### **4.5 The sequences of *Black and White* performance**

The opening scene of *Black and White* begins with the presentation of the guqin, the Chinese musical instrument. Wu Na enters the stage as a one of the performers and sits on the upstage left. The mellifluous and rotund tones of guqin are floating in the air. Her live guqin solo is around five minutes long in order to impress the audience with her peaceful resonance. Meanwhile, a mural of *Ramakien* is slightly projected as a stage backdrop. The monochrome tableau (figure 11) on the screen demonstrates the battle between the two opposite troops. Rama stands on the top of Hanuman, his monkey warrior on the left, while Inthorachit and the demon army on the right hand side.

After that, the picture gradually disappears. Four male dancers appear wearing fully modern versions of traditional *khon* masks and costumes. The masks are decorated with metallic leather and artefact jewellery. Likewise, the modern costumes are embroidered with silver threads on black and white garments. They move step-by-step in horizontal line from the opposite sides. Then they encounter each other on the centre stage and stand in one line in *Liem* position, the basic

stance of the demon *khon* character. Klunchun portrays the meaning of balance by choreographing four dancers in one row, from upstage to downstage (figure 3). The dancers slightly transfer their weight between the left leg and right leg in order to explore the balance in silence. This movement of transferring weight in the *Liem* position is one of the dance exercises in the rehearsals.

Then the new tuneful qugin sound comes in space. Klunchun, a black demon role, and Rungsawang as a white female character, slowly walk in the same line to meet each other. Rungsawang gently ambles with a daily movement of a human being whereas Klunchun walks with in a stylish *khon* dance style. On the way to encounter with each other they gradually stop and keep an eye on each other for a lengthy period of time. The woman spreads out her metal long nails like a bird wing. Four dancers instantly separate into two troops in a diagonal line. Afterwards, they start to fight. Meanwhile, the black bald demon (Klunchun) and the woman (Rungsawang) stand in stillness. The movements in this scene mainly employ the traditional *khon* movement of the demon character.

In addition, the *Khuk Phat*, one of *Na Phat* choreographies is brought into this scene. This choreography is a well-reasoned choice because it expresses the magic power and anger of the demon characters. The four dancers perform very precise traditional *khon* dancing but in the unconventional setting of *khon and Na Phat* choreography. *Khon*, as a dance-drama, should represent by facing the audience. In particular, *Na Phat* performance is always performed as a solo dance. In contrast, Klunchun thought that it is a simple dance routine. He cuts out the tradition of *Na Phat* and the characters of *khon* but emphasising *khon* dancing and

its movement instead. He adds many choreographic devices such as unison, canon pathway, dynamics, space, relationships, and so forth.

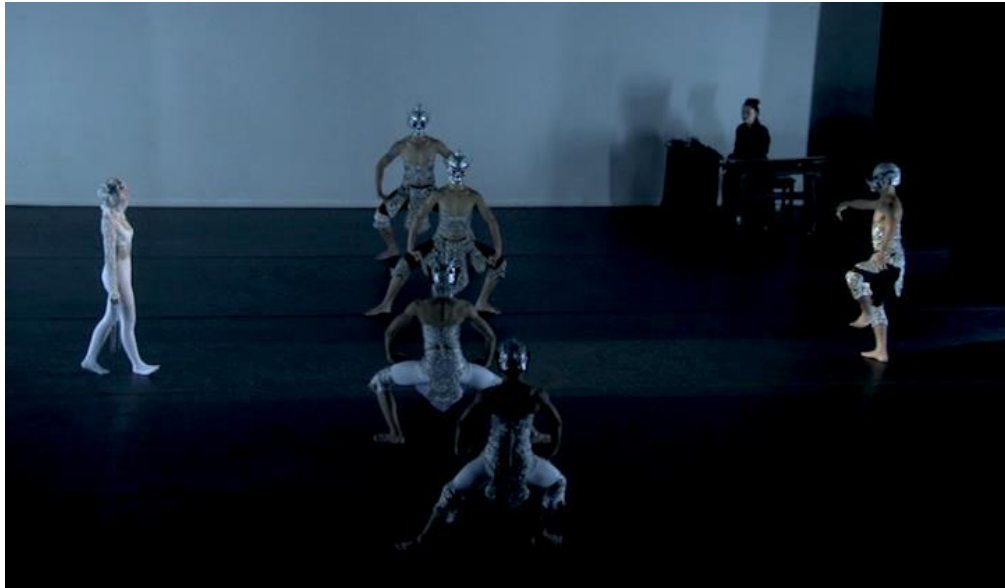


Figure 4.3 Screen shot of *Black and White* at minute 5.40

The light tunefulness of guqin's prolonged notes allow the audience to listen to the tough stamping sounds of the dancers' feet, whether in unison or in canon sound. At the end of the quartet dance, they employ some gesticulations and mime gestures in *khon* to dialogue with their couples and summon each other to battle. However, they are not in the fighting position. Klunchun categorises these mime gestures as the "realistic" dance language of *khon* while *Mae Tha*—all of the basic *khon* movements, are classified as "abstract" (Klunchun *Thai dance language*). The battle conversation between the duo continues until one drives the other out of the scene. Later the four dancers leave the stage for the duet between the male demon and the female character. They slightly move to the upstage with a dim spot light. Then they slowly walk past each other toward centre stage with careful and watchful feelings (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.4 Screen shot of *Black and White* at minute 14.40

In the second part of the show, the shade of the tree is illuminated on the stage floor. The battle painting of the black-and-white monkeys (figure 4.2) is presented in the backdrop. Jumpan, the monkey *khon* dancer, jumps onto the stage with acrobatic *khon* movements, for example cartwheels and somersaults. His solo employs the basic movement of *khon* for a few minutes and later he moves his arms in straight and curved lines whereas his footsteps remain somewhat in an angular pattern. Then the other two dancers, Puatput and Maneerat, join the dance. The trio of performers wears nude trunks and alternately pass back and forth on the stage. They bring free-form movements into play until they go away from Puatput and leave him to do a solo performance (Figure 15). Puatput dances with his back facing the audience. His improvised movement is very slow, fluid, and seductive. The dance integrates the free hand and movements and *Liem* or

angular patterns of the legs. Sometimes his hand and wrist movements bend between *khon* and free form.

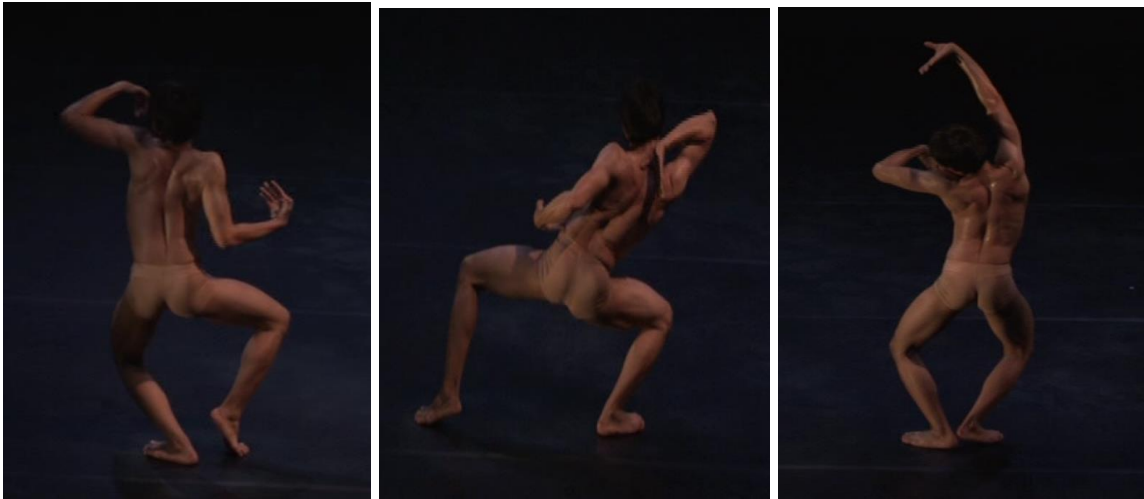


Figure 4.5 Screen shot of *Black and White* during minutes 23-27

Puatput's dance tries to lure someone into his space. Then Klunchun, the male black demon, walks stealthily with his foot-long metal rod downstage right, followed by two dancers engaged in Puatput's dancing. One dancer comes to battle with him and another one comes to support him. This battle dance exhibits some Thai martial art movements, which is one of the origins of the *khon*. Punching, kicking, stamping, and defensive poses are combined in the dance piece. In the end, the two dancers in the white troop gradually drive their rival to the back of the stage.

The third part of the show is continued with the male demon stamping his rod rhythmically in the corner. Later the woman comes to confront him on stage. Gobo lighting divides the stage into two spaces. The two male dancers from different sides encounter each other in the centre (Figure 4.6) and they perform the demon *khon* dance routine of *Sa-Moe Marn* (the walking dance of the demon).

Meanwhile in the peripheral area the male black demon (Klunchun) and the female character display the dance routine of *Baht Sa Ku Nee* (the walking dance of god). These two dance routines are similar as Thai dance form for general and foreign audiences. If someone has *khon* dance knowledge, he should categorise the *khon* characters—the four main characters—as male human, female human, demon, and monkey. Moreover, the person that is a well-trained *khon* dancer should be familiar with some of the traditional dance routines. However, if the audience is composed of specialists in Thai dance, they will understand the sources and choices in the creative dance-making process of Pichet Klunchun.



Figure 4.6 Screen shot of *Black and White* at minutes 29.46

Klunchun adjusts and changes the dynamic and timing of these traditional *khon* dance routines. The pose dance following the rhythm of the *Na Phat* songs in traditional style was refined to be in very slow motion and fluid movements without pause or stillness in motion throughout the entire dance routines. He extends the period of timing in the dance by altering and reconsidering the dance quality. Then he uses the flowing and fluid movements for these dance pieces. This scene represents the thinking moment of a human mind that attempts to balance opposing forces.



Figure 4.7 Screen shot of *Black and White* at minutes 34.06

After they completed the dance routines of *Na Phat*, the other two dancers participate in the dance to make the tableau vivid with the acrobatic pyramids of *khon* a few seconds (Figure 4.7). Subsequently, all of the dancers move off stage and highlight for the solo of Rungsawang (Figure 4.8).



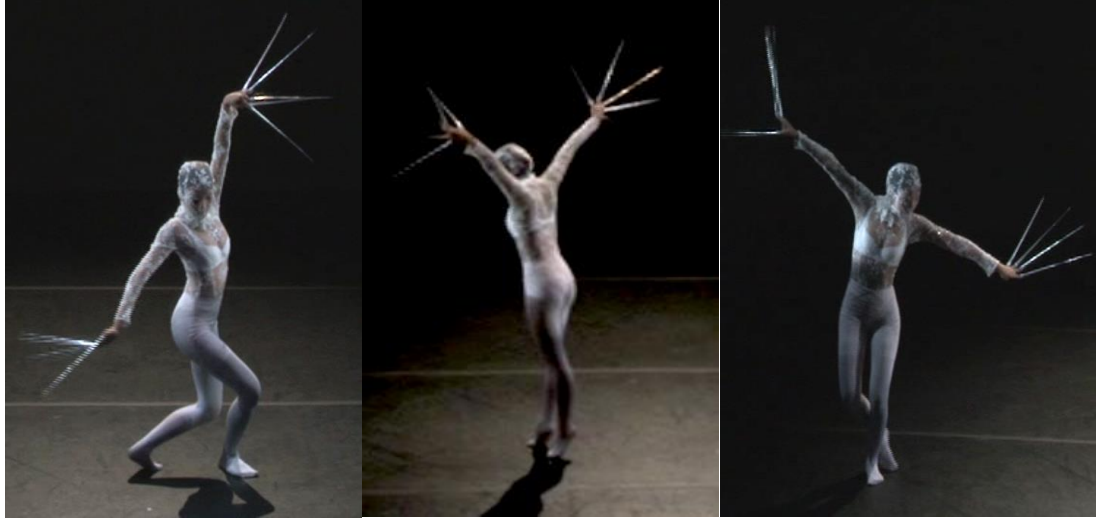


Figure 4.8 Screen shot of *Black and White* during minutes 40-42

This female character applies various movements, both male human and female human *khon* characters, to merge into her dance depending on the motivation and objective of the character at that moment. After her solo Klunchun, the black demon reappears on the stage in order to battle; however, it is not face-to-face fighting or confrontation. They isolate with each other in dissimilar places while their shadows on the backdrop fight instead (Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9 Screen shot of *Black and White* at minute 45

This imaginative battle uses silhouette as the character of the Thai shadow puppet, one of the roots of *khon*. After that the four dancers reappears to convey their abstract dance (Figure 4.10). Some of the movements of traditional *khon* in the battle scene were selected to develop this quartet dance. Klunchun utilised the abstract movement of *khon*, the basic battle poses, as his starting point. The music arrangements of Wu Na reminded the audience that what they are watching is not classical *khon*.



Figure 4.10 The abstract dance in the final part of *Black and White*



Figure 4.11 Screen shot of *Black and White* at minute 60

In the final scene of *Black and White* (Figure 4.11), four dancers stand in *Liem* position as the beginning of the show but in different directions and spaces. Each dancer stands and transfers his weight between the narrow lighting line where half of his body appears. The female character reappears and walks across the stage. She wears the black demon mask backward and carries her metal rod. This tableau represents the mind of a human being.

#### **4.6 The battle dance pattern in traditional *khon* performance**

The battle pose is called *Tha Chap* (caching pose). There are a large number of battle poses in the mural paintings. In addition, these fighting postures were derived from the images of Nang Yai (traditional Thai shadow puppet). The process of puppet making, however, emphasises the aesthetic and composition of the entire shadow puppet's image rather than regarding the practicable positions that the *khon* dancer can achieve. Therefore, some of the marvellous fighting

poses in the two-dimensional mural paintings and shadow puppets were difficult to imitate in the real *khon* movement.

There are four basic fighting patterns between the demon and the monkey characters in the traditional *khon* performance (Tadti 245). The first position is *Chap Neung* (the first catching pose) (Sayakom 249, Tadti 245). The demon and monkey dancers stand on opposite sides. In the traditional *khon* performance, the good troop of Rama and his monkey warriors are set on stage left of the audience while Tosakanth and his demon armies take place on the other side. Both combatants move to encounter each other with their own weapons in hand—a double-edged sword for the monkey and a baton for the demon. After the confrontation, they lift one leg up with knees bent while their supporting legs slightly stretch the knee. Suddenly they hop in the same place on their supporting leg and put the lifted leg down to create *Liem* (similar to the grand-plié in the second position of ballet). In the position of *Chap Neung*, the same side legs and knees overlap each other while their hands catch the weapons of each other at the chest level. The monkey dancer can add his specific of head movements and gesticulations related to the role, such as nodding the face or mocking. Later, the monkey and the demon alternatively step on each other's knees in order to show their vigor and power. Then they gradually move away from each other using the *Kep Thao* or *Soi Thao* step—standing on the tip of their feet, quickly and alternately stepping down with their left and right feet to move in different directions.



Figure 4.12: Chap Neung (the first caching pose)



Figure 4.13 The similar pose of *Chap Neung* in the first part (left)



Figure 4.14 The similar pose of *Chap Neung* in the last part (right)

In *Black and White*, the audience can view many different postures referring to the *Chap Neung* position. Klunchun focused on the contact between the feet and knee, while the angular position or *Liem* can be changed or adjusted in different forms. This is one kind of contact or touching style that stemmed from the original *khon* movement.

The second fighting position is called *Kwai* (crossing position) (Sayakom 250, Tadt 247). The demon and monkey come face-to-face with each other.

Likewise, the same pattern is repeated, similar to the first position, where they switch to put their foot on their opponent's leg. This dance pattern is more complicated and difficult than the first position. The monkey employs his foot to clamp the rod of the demon instead of placing it on the demon's knee. At the finish position, the monkey turns himself and crosses his left leg to the hip of the demon while both hands hold each other's weapons.



Figure 4.15 The second fighting position or *Kwai*

The third position is called *Hok Kad* (biting position) (Sayakom 250, Tadt 248). The demon creates the *Liem* position with a curved right arm at a high level (*Wong Bon*) and with the baton pointing to the back. The monkey crosses his upper body over to the back of the demon and using the left hand pulls the demon's shoulder while the right hand catches the demon's baton while lifting and bending the right leg so that the demon can grab the ankle. This represents the monkey biting the side of the demon's body. Afterwards, the demon leans his body weight backward and pushes himself away from the monkey.





Figure 4.16 The third fighting position or *Hok Kad*

The fourth position is the last position in the battle scene, the so-called *Tha Plad* or *Tha Tai*, which means the death pose (Tadti 248). The demon and monkey use the weapons with their right hands while crushing each other. Meanwhile, the left hand of the demon supports the right leg of the monkey while using the weapons against each other back and forth. Following this movement, the monkey jumps and steps his left leg on the knee of the demon, grasping the baton with his left hand and then using his sword, knifing at the demon's side. In the end, the demon portrays falling and leaving the stage.



Figure 4.17 The fourth fighting position, *Tha Plad* or *Tha Tai*

This is a basic fighting pattern between the normal characters of the monkey and demon in the traditional *khon* performance. Similar to the high-ranking characters use the same fighting dance pattern, but have increased the entry and departure of the characters dramatically. For instance, the high-ranking demon character mostly uses a bow to fight—a particular weapon for the demon king like a Tosakanth. The demon wields his bow and hits the floor left and right alternately in order to drive the monkey away. The demon performer uses the powerful steps of *Kep Thao* or *Soi Thao*—standing on the tip of his feet and quickly and alternately stepping down with left and right feet. Both warriors must dance with correct rhythm and precise dance pattern while using their weapons.



Figure 4.18 The adaptation of battle poses in *Black and White* stemmed from the second, third, and fourth fighting position of *Khon*.

In *Black and White*, the dances employed many kinds of fighting poses and contacts, from the second to fourth positions above, to create a new dance movement. The dancers continue the bending knee and lifting the leg backward pose whereas they change their position at various levels and directions that do



not restrict the traditional patterns. Nonetheless, they also adapted many kinds of contact between the hands and feet, inventing even more new contact in different poses such as feet and feet, hand and hand, or using hand and feet to gently touch other parts of the body. This kind of contact does not push the weight or transfer the body weight between the dancers as in the contact improvisation technique in the West. Klunchun drew on the original style of the gentle touching of *khon*.

There is one special catching position in the fighting pose, so-called *Huk Cheek* (Sayakom 250, Tadti 254). The name denotes the action of the monkey character bending his body downward in handstand position and separating the legs. The demon catches one leg of the monkey whilst the other leg is under the arm of the demon.



Figure 4.19 *Huk Cheek* in traditional *khon* dance



Figure 4.20 *Huk Cheek* in *Black and White* with fully modern costumes

Figure 4.21 *Huk Cheek* in *Black and White* without the costumes

In *Black and White*, *Huk Cheek* imitated the same pose using in different parts of the show such as the duet dance with modern *khon* costume, and the trio or quartet abstract dance piece. The figure (Figure 4.21) shows one dancer coming into kneeling position in order to support the other dancer (monkey), who in in the *Huk Cheek* position. Instead of a duet traditional *khon* dance, Kluncun gradually places additional dancers to be a trio and quartet dance piece in order to represent the supporting movement and meaning of his choreography.

Moreover, the chorography of *Black and White* adopted some special acrobatic pyramid *khon* poses. There are many types of acrobatic pyramid poses in the battle scene, such as the so-called *Kuen Loi*. The *Kuen Loi* pose is the action of one *khon* character standing or floating on the top of the other. Only the principal *khon* characters can employ this pose, which was created to represent the distinct fighting step or the step for using weapons. Most of the main demon characters must be the supporter or lifter, where the royal male characters, such as Phra Ram,

Phra Luk, and the great monkeys like Hanuman, are standing on the top. Traditionally, this dance pattern has three positions: *Loi Neung* (the first lift), *Loi Song* (the second lift), and *Loi Sam* (the third lift) (Sayakom 251-2, Tadtii 251-3). In addition, the battles between the different characters have different positions for these poses.



Figure 4.22 *Loi Neung*, *Loi Song* and *Loi Sam* of monkey and demon khon characters (lift to right respectively)



Figure 4.23 Some *Kuen Loi* positions in trio dance, *Black and White* (left)



Figure 4.24 Some *Kuen Loi* positions in quartet dance *Black and White* (right)

The above figure displays some parts of the trio and quartet dance that employ many kinds of *Kuen Loi* poses. This pose in the traditional *khon* always presents a pausing motion in the air with a duet. In contrast, Klunchun choreographs by using more dancers as supporters. He intends to present fluidity and slow-motion weight transferring movement in this abstract dance piece. Besides the basic *Kuen Loi* poses between the principal monkey and demon characters, there are special *Kuen Loi* poses and an acrobatic pyramid pose between the demon and male human *khon* characters.

The special pose is *Loi Bar* (floating on the shoulder). For this pose, the demon lifts the monkey with one hand. The monkey must leave his weight on the demon's shoulder. This traditional *khon* pose is the specific pose for Hanuman and some of the high-ranking monkey characters, which use the bald mask (Tadti 256). For this pose, if the demon is holding a bow as his weapon, the monkey can use his feet to pinch the tip of the demon's bow (Figure 4.25).



Figure 4.25 *Loi Bar* in traditional khon dance (left)



Figure 4.26 *Loi Bar* in *Black and White* (right)



Figure 4.27 The final grand battle position in the traditional *khon* (left)



Figure 4.28 The final grand battle position of *khon* in *Black and White* (right)

The comparison of the figures above shows how Klunchun adopted the traditional *khon* position as an integral part of his creation of modern *khon* dance. The word of modern Thai dance was never used obviously in Thai Dance scene. *Black and White* demonstrates how Klunchun's company modernises *khon*

dancing and traditional movements as an innovative dance form. As he attests, “This is the first dance group in Thailand in the last ten years that does this kind of innovation and nobody has done this before” (Klunchun, *Black and White*).

Through the present author’s observation and practice with this dance work, it can be concluded that the choreography directly sprang from the original *khon* movements. In the Thai classical form of dance-drama, the performers portray to be a character in order to narrate the story. In terms of dance, there are not many movements that involve contact or touching between the dancers. However, all of these contact movements were created especially for the battle scene of *khon*. As a result of this, some critics have tended to analyse *Black and White* as a combination of *khon* and contact improvisation or inventing new terminology for the dance form. For instance, the company experimented with *Black and White* as a new piece to invent “*khon* contact improvisation” (Mahasarinand, “*Black*”). It can be asserted however that the contact in *khon* and the contact improvisation technique are totally different. Categorising his dance as a fusion dance form might be a misunderstanding or over interpretation.

Many parts of the choreography are quite similar to traditional *khon* dance routines, while some of the sub-choreography is free-form movement. In Klunchun’s view, this performance does not convey a sense of contemporary dance but he identifies it as “modern *khon* dance” (Klunchun Feb 2013). In Thailand, the period when modern (Thai) dance began is not very clear. It seems that this intermediary stage between classical Thai dance and contemporary dance was lost in Thai dance history. There are no Thai dance choreographies that can refer

to the period where modern Thai dance started. The choreography of *Black and White* might be a new phenomenon that can be designated as “modern *khon* dance.” The dance form and its techniques refer to the modern ballet dance style. Klunchun states that his development process in creating dance is similar to the development process of Cunningham’s choreography as a form of modern ballet (Klunchun Feb 2013). Likewise, in Cunningham’s company the dancers should be well trained in classical ballet in order to be able to create his modern choreography. Related to Klunchun’s dance company all of his dancers must be skillfully trained in *khon* and Thai classical dance techniques. In order to experiment with his new movements in the choreography of *Black and White*, all of the dancers have to profoundly understand and practise the fighting postures of *khon* since the movement style of the show is derived directly from classical Thai *khon* dance. The development process of the choreography is not a hybrid between different dance forms—the combination of *khon* dance and other dance forms. On the contrary, the root of *khon* movements was purely expanded and progressed into a modern way of dancing by Klunchun. *Black and White* choreography manifests the strong pace of Klunchun’s dance progression.



## Chapter 5

### The Visual Aesthetics of *Black and White*

#### 5.1 The Creativity of *Black and White's* masks

The *Ramakien* depicts many different deities, human and non-human characters. That was the beginning of the *khon* mask's creation—to symbolise a code of performance for indicating the specificity of each character in *khon*. Masks are the most important characteristic of *khon* and are regarded as one of the national crafts of Thailand. A *khon* mask is a work of high art, incorporating many disciplines of craftsmanship, for instance that of the sculptor, engraver, and painter. The mask is not only integral for *khon* performance but it also has become a symbol of Thai culture. This can be seen from the masks which have been scaled down or made without back sides as souvenirs or decorations in various locations such as hotel rooms, exhibitions, and restaurants. Moreover, the masks also became art objects and collectibles for the artistic taste of collectors as well.

Many Thai royal performances receive their costumes and headdress from *Chak Nak Duekdamban*, the ritual of the “Indrapisak” royal ceremony during the Ayutthaya era. Prince Narathip translated the word “mask” in the *Depiction of Siam* by Simon de la Loubere as “*Na khon*”, which means *khon* face in the Thai language instead of “*Hua khon*” (*khon* head) (cited in Wongthes 244). It can be assumed that the *khon* mask in the beginning period might have covered only the visage of the dancers, not the entire head. Later on, the mask developed into a so-called helmet mask covering the whole head and face of the performer, so it is called *Hua khon*. This was because it was more convenient and practical when the



performance contained a number of performers, particularly in the battlefield scene.

The creation of the *khon* mask is a ritualized act. The mask creator must participate in the *Wai-kru* ceremony in order to pay respect to his masters and his knowledge. For creating the *khon* masks for the prominent characters such as the Hermit (Reusi), Phra Pirab<sup>58</sup>, Phra Ganesh, makers need to get permission from their masters. The mask maker must participate a special worship ceremony particularly for the *khon* mask every year (Hua *Khon* 337). In addition, the creation of the *khon* mask contains many small details and processes. First, the *khon* mask artist has to set up a worship ceremony for the equipment, called the *Bud-Kee* ceremony. In this step, the artist has to worship the god of creation and recognise his obligation toward his master or teacher by chanting. Then, he invites the gods, the spirits of the *khon* mask teacher, to attend the ceremony of the creation of the *khon* mask. These is a process of mask making to create a completed *khon* mask. After that, they perform the “Berk-Phra-Nade” or “opening the eye” ceremony for the new *khon* mask. It is believed that the masks in this ritual were sacred when utilised in the performance (Arkorn Sayakorn 52). The *khon* performers cannot modify the masks that underwent the Berk-Phra-Nade ceremony because of the

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<sup>58</sup> Phra PiRab is the greatest teacher of Thai dramatic arts and music, an avatar of the Hindu God Lord Shiva (or Phra I-Suan in Thai). There are various other names for him: Phra PaiRaWa, Birab, Phra I-Suan Black or Phra I-Suan Fierce. There are different postures of Phra PiRab. The subduing devil posture, *Pang Prab Marn* is very respectable for Thais. The choreography of *Na Phat Phra PiRab* is the most highly respected in Thai dramatic arts. There were a few of dance masters of the demon character that inherited this choreography. One of those masters is Chaiyot Kummanee, Pichet Klunchun’s *khon* dance teacher.

superstitious belief that if the performers fixed or repaired the mask by themselves it might lead to unexpected accidents. However, this old belief may have come from the fact that the *khon* mask is made of paper. The eye area of the *khon* mask is usually decorated with jewels and opals. If the non-professional modifies it, there is a high chance of damaging the *khon* mask. The *khon* master maker might have enacted this regulation in order to prevent unexpected incidents (Hua *Khon* 348). Furthermore, in the annual *Wai-kru* ceremony, especially for the Thai dance performance, the *khon* masks had to be installed during the ceremony. By displaying the *khon* mask, they had to consider the hierarchy of the *khon* characters; pictures of former masters of the *khon* dance were also included in the ceremony (Hua *Khon* 344). *Khon* masks are strongly attached to beliefs, rituals, social beliefs, and social values in Thai culture and society. It is inappropriate for a foreigner to display a real *khon* mask in his or her house for viewing pleasure, or treat it as an exotic decoration item (Arkorn Sayakom 50).

The power, social status, and party of the Ramakien characters are indicated in the artistic creation of the *khon* mask. Every character in Ramakien has a specific personality and the *khon* mask maker creates colours, characteristics of the *khon* face, and the decoration of the head ornaments based on the status of the character in the Ramakien. This is in order to make it easier for the audience to classify the characters in the story. *Khon* masks can be divided into three main categories. First of all, there are human masks showing a standard human face structure but with different facial painting and head decorations depending on the personality of the character. Second, the demon mask, which

has the same facial structure as the human one but contains a more furious and demonic face. Finally, the simian and other animal masks. For them, there are two styles of *khon* mask: a full-head mask, which covers all of the performers' head, and an open-face head mask.

Not only the facial structure of the *khon* mask, but also the head ornaments and hairdressing are indicators that classify the category, rank, and social status of the *khon* characters. The concept and feature of the head ornaments in *khon* were adopted from royal articles of use. As such, the sharp-pointed crown of the male *khon* character resembles the shape of the great crown of victory (phra maha pichai mongkut), one of the royal regalia of the king of Thailand (Siam). Many demon characters, especially Tosakanth's relatives and friends who are the kings of diverse cities, also are portrayed with such a peaked crown. However, the maker would differentiate the character by creating different styles of the demon crown (Hua *Khon* 24). In addition, for some demon characters with the same components of head ornaments and face structure, the mask maker would create different complexions and facial features on their face in order to designate their own unique characters. Moreover, specific weapons and vehicles of each character could use to define the characters as well. The facial features and expressions of the *khon* mask make each character have a distinguishing personality. As such, the monkey mask has the same facial structure elements so the makers would make different mouth faces: a closed mouth and an open mouth, for example. The demons could have two types of eyes: bulging (wide-open eyes) or crocodile (partially-closed eyes) and two types of mouths: clamping or snarling (Bridhyakorn and Yupho

1962, 14). These structures and features of the *khon* traditional mask included the Thai traditional art of painting and sculpture, which are the basic elements that the mask maker used to invent and develop the modern versions of the *khon* mask.

## 5.2 The Mask Designer and His Creation

Anutep Pojprasat is a designer of creative masks for the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company. He is the artist and painter that specialises in *khon* mask sculpture. Pojprasat started his modern mask works for Pichet Klunchun when Klunchun set up the Life Work Dance Company. His earlier work included seven *khon* masks that were reflections of the demon in Buddhism. This work of art is part of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004). He began to make mask pieces from his passion for creating the perfect and well-made craft of the *khon* mask. Later, he combined his Thai traditional painting and sculpture skills into his *khon* mask making and became one of the most acclaimed *khon* mask makers in Thai history. He believed and asserted that there was a connection of traditional art with other forms of art to create universalism in art and contemporary art (Pojprasat 2013). Because of his unconventional thoughts, he became one of the experimental *khon* mask makers that developed art pieces from the roots of one's own tradition and culture. Conservative audiences are not able to accept his works sometimes.

In *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004), Klunchun, as the artistic director and choreographer, gave instructions to Pojprasat to create demon masks with different characters by using black and gold colours. Pojprasat managed to break the ground of *khon* mask skills and received inspiration from the demon in

Buddhism. Pojprasat (2013) explained that there were many meanings for demons. He questioned whether it was necessary for a demon to have only a demonic appearance like the traditional demon *khon* mask. The religious mural paintings on the Thai Buddhist temple, in particular the painting of “Man pha-jon” (Temptation of Mara), exhibited various perspectives and kinds of demons and *mara*. Paintings were drawn from the personal reflection of the painter on the demon. The demon then does not have to take after the conventional demonic shape. But Thai artists are conservative and generally safeguard the traditional forms of art. In contrast, Pojprasat decided to shift this perspective of the *khon* mask by integrating the demon features with the human-face form, creating a new bird-shaped demon. Klunchun gave full permission to his mask designer to interpret according to his creative process. There was a mutual vision and shared values regarding the artistic direction. This innovation in the demon mask was the starting point of his contemporary versions in *khon* performance.

The mask maker uses the paper mâché technique to build the modern mask of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004). He builds up and modifies the facial structure of the *khon* mask through the improvisation of the sculpture artists. Pojprasat (2013) admitted that his works are heavy so it is quite difficult for the *khon* mask dancer to move and dance with his masks. The choreographer decided to change the movement routine in this piece into a slow motion dance movement that is similar to the *Butoh* dance style of taking off the mask and holding it instead of wearing the mask, while the *Black and White* performance uses a light-weight *khon* mask so the dancer has more flexibility to move and dance. The evolution of Thai

traditional painting and Thai contemporary painting has been expanded and spread beyond the previous time. However, contemporary artists still gain inspiration from the notion of traditional painting in order to create their works. Pojprasat (2013) further stated that the most important thing in contemporary art is the strong knowledge of the traditional art form of the artist. Pichet Klunchun is a good example of the contemporary dancer, who is expert in the *khon* Thai traditional masked dance. It is a powerful foundation for him to invent contemporary dance based on his craft and skills in Thai dance.

Figure 5.1 presents five Golden-Black *khon* masks of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA* (2004) and the *Akattalai* mask of *Black and White* (2001), including the great Thai shadow puppet of the Buddha image. These art works on the Buddhist altar in Pichet Klunchun's house were created and designed by Poiprasat. This picture is clearly evidence that Klunchun placed his contemporary *khon* mask on Buddhist altar a part of the holy statues in his house.



Figure 5.1 The art works on the Buddhist altar in Pichet Klunchun's house

However, these contemporary masks did not join the Berk-Nade ritual like the traditional *khon* mask. However, he pays his respect to the art of the *khon* dance in different ways from the traditional one. He values the contemporary mask in his own way since we can see that he displays the *khon* mask on the Buddhist altar in his house. Most of the superstitious beliefs in Thai traditional dance should have reasons behind them in order for the traditional dancer to believe in them. This should be connected and linked to the dancer's daily life rather than forced onto the dancer. For Klunchun (2013) no matter whether the mask is traditional or contemporary *khon* mask, if it gives you an inspiration to your dance it should be worshipped like a holy item.

### 5.3 The inspirations of mask making in *Black and White*

The masks in the *Black and White* mask performance were made to be representations of the battlefield between good and evil in *Ramakien*. The performance is based on the abstract notion of both goodness and foulness, which have to lean on each other. Klunchun received inspiration from “Pab-chap”, the fighting scene between the gods, human, demons and simians in the mural paintings of *Ramakien* along the galleries of the Emerald Buddha Temple in Bangkok. This war scene became well known since there are many high art forms such as mural paintings, Thai traditional puppet and the *khon* masked play represented this episode of *Ramakien*. Moreover, it can be assumed that Klunchun and Pojprasart also received inspiration from fine art masterpieces, for instance “*For the Love of God*” (2007), the diamond skull of Damien Hirst,<sup>59</sup> and the Rock Crystal Skull of the British Museum<sup>60</sup>. Hence they desired to create a modern *khon* mask by using the shape of a skull in a monochrome perspective.

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<sup>59</sup> Damien Hirst was born in 1965 in Bristol and grew up in Leeds. He graduated with a B.A. Fine Arts from Goldsmiths College from (makes no sense to say from 1986 to 1989 since graduate is something that takes place at one time—rewrite this and ask questions if needed) 1986 to 1989. He was awarded the Turner Prize in 1995. See <http://www.damienhirst.com/biography/solo-exhibitions> for further information.

<sup>60</sup> The Rock Crystal Skull of the British Museum has been an object of fascination since the second half of the nineteenth century when it began to appear in public. See further: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/young\\_explorers/discover/museum\\_explorer/americas/death/rock\\_crystal\\_skull.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/young_explorers/discover/museum_explorer/americas/death/rock_crystal_skull.aspx)



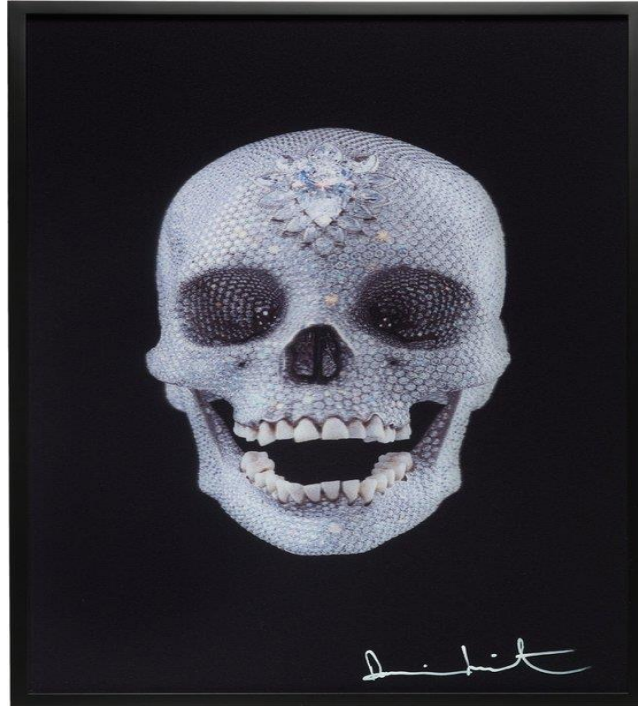


Figure 5.2 *For the Love of God* (2012), Damien Hirst's print rendition of the diamond skull



Figure 5.3: The Rock Crystal Skull from the British Museum

#### 5.4 The Mask Creation of *Black and White*

Pojprasat designed the modern mask and the costume for this production based on the idea of death. He imagined the dead appearance of some of the characters in *Ramakien*. Then he invented the structure of the skull mask, relying on each *khon* character that he selected. However, he did not intend to use the specific characters of his mask creation for narrating the story of *Ramakien*. He merely employed some characters to be his inspiration and basic elements for his creation. The colour and material of *Black and White*'s masks seem weighty. In fact, they are much lighter than both the traditional *khon* masks and the masks of *I-TAP-PAJ-JA-YA-TA*. Because *Black and White*'s dancers have to wear these masks on stage, the designer needed to experiment with materials and processes to make the lightweight masks.

The ancient traditional technique and process of *khon* mask making was used to make the modern masks in this production. First, Pojprasat used the paper mâché technique to build up the structure of the *khon* mask and then polished the mask step by step with sandpaper to reduce the weight. He discovered all of these processes by himself. After he got the skull masks of simian and demon he paints the black and white colours on these masks to the monochrome layer. Later, he moulded the facial structure to make it look realistic, and used wooden sticks to make the demon fangs. He decorated the head dressing of the *khon* mask by using only black and white fake leather and costume jewellery. He carefully formed the line by pinning the jewellery by following the Thai traditional painting line. This technique makes the *khon* mask "Soung-Kreung", which means god-like or "Chao",

with the head dressing reproducing the form of royal jewels. This is the reason that the *khon* mask is counted as a high art form of Thai performance. Most of audiences who have experienced with *khon* could identify the *khon* character by the masks or the headdresses of because the *khon* mask character has its own unique headdresses.



Figure 5.4 The masks of *Black and White* (left to right): Kumphakan, Hanuman, Tosakanth, Akattalai and Inthorachit, respectively

There are five characters in the *Ramakien* story, which inspired Pojprasat and Klunchun to create the modern *khon* masks. These are Kumphakan, Hanuman, Tosakanth, Akattalai and Inthorachit. In *Black and White*, Hanuman is the only simian character and warrior of Rama in the white party. All of the rest are demon characters, having the same dark side as Tosakanth. It is evident that the *khon* mask creators invented these modern mask pieces based on the fundamental practice of *khon* dancers in the company. Most of the male dancers

in the company, including Klunchun himself, have been practicing the demon *khon* character, while there is only one dancer, Padung Jumpan, who was trained as a monkey, a *khon* character. Therefore, the mask-maker created only a mask of Hanuman, the monkey character, for him.

In the first war scene in *Black and White*, Klunchun divided those characters into the *Black and White* team. Kumphakan, Tosakanth, and Inthorachit are on the Black team, whose attire and masks are black in colour, while the White team has three roles: Hanuman, Akattalai, and an unnamed female character wearing white masks and costumes. It is surprising that instead of using another monkey character to perform the same group with Hanuman, the creator chose Akattalai, a female demon character. According to the *Ramakien* story, Akattalai is the opponent of Hanuman. She is an air patrol warrior who protects the Longka city of Tosakanth. Unfortunately, Hanuman killed her in the battlefield when he surveyed the route to the city of Longka.

However, Klunchun decided to disengage freely from *khon* characters in each troop of *Black and White* because he did not present the characters and story of *Ramakien*. Hence he gave creative room for the designer to explore and make decision. He also added one more female character that wears a white bodysuit and white lace mask. Knowledgeable audiences and Thai traditional dancers, especially those familiar with *khon*-masked dance, could easily interpret the Thai traditional dance code that Pojprasat modified (the cultural code modified into modern masks, head ornaments, decorations and costumes). Also, the *khon* masked dance routines of every dancer have their own specific fundamental dance

forms of Thai traditional dance. With this piece, Klunchun did not tell the story of *Ramakien* using the traditional *khon* dance; he took the elements of *khon* and its story to create his own contemporary dance in *Black and White*.

#### **5.4.1 Kumphakan Mask**

Kumphakan's mask is the first of the series that Klunchun wears and performs by himself. Originally, Kumphakan was the demon king, the younger brother of the king Tosakanth. He sports a bald demon mask with four different facial expressions in order to differentiate himself from other lower-ranking bald demon characters. This demon mask has a normal demon face in front with three other small faces on the back of the mask. He grins and his opened mouth reveals hyper-bent, upward fangs. He has wide-bulging eyes with a furious face. He wears a golden diadem in Thai style without a high-level crown. He has a green complexion. For this contemporary mask creation, the mask maker used his signature of external appearance but cut the colour and his facial details of by emphasising the bent-upward fangs and the bald mask.



Figure 5.5 Kumphakan mask of Thai National Museum (left)

Figure 5.6 Kumphakan mask of College of Dramatic Arts, Thailand (right)

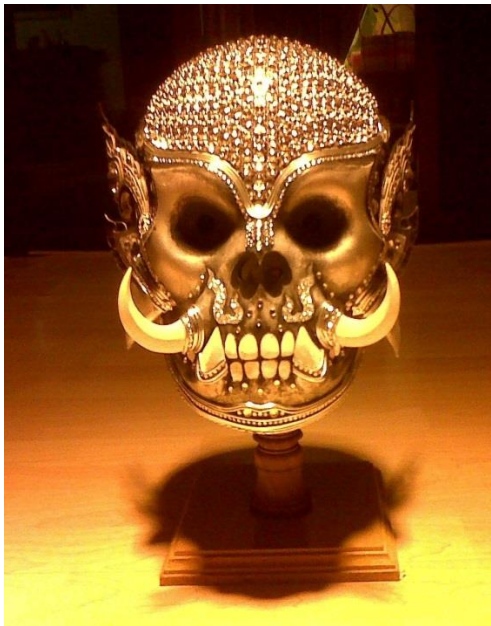


Figure 5.7 Kumphakan mask of Pichet Klunchun Dance Company

#### 5.4.2 Tosakanth Mask

The traditional *khon* mask of Tosakanth, or Ravana, is generally of green complexion. He has a normal demon face in front and three small faces at the back of his head. He wears a crown of victory differentiated by two tiers of faces within the crown. The first level has the four small faces on four sides, while the top level of the crown is a celestial face (Brahma) in the front and a demon face in the back. He has in all ten faces on his mask. The major face has bulging eyes and a smirking mouth with long bent-upward fangs. In *Black and White*, the mask maker decides to cut levels of jewel crown off, because it is more convenient for movement and dance. The mask is decorated with six small skulls in articulate form around the top of the crown. The number of faces is ten, the same amount as the traditional mask. Pojprasat (2013) accepted that he is not satisfied with this Tosakanth mask and would like to change some details in his design. For example, the mask should retain two crown levels but with decreased height and some of the original details. He thought that it might make the mask look more elegant and show the rank of Tosakanth.



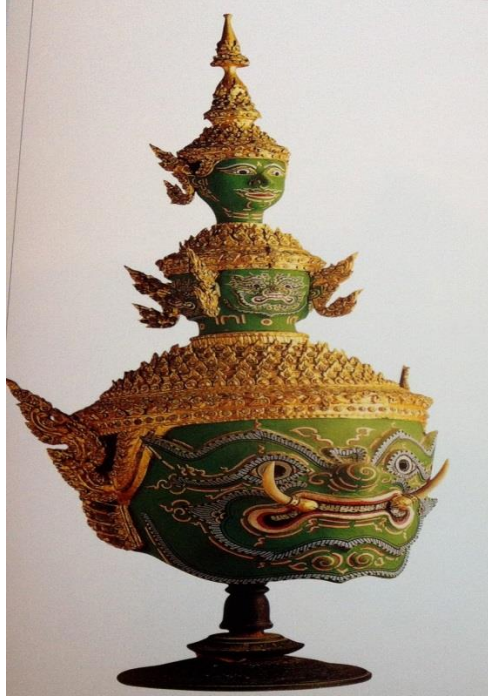


Figure 5.8 The traditional *khon* mask of Tosakanth (left)



Figure 5.9 Tosakanth mask of *Black and White* (right)

### 5.4.3 Inthorachit Mask

Inthorachit or Indrajit is a son and heir of Tosakanth and Nang Montho. His name literally means the conqueror of Indra (the Hindu king of gods). His *khon* mask has a green complexion face as well, with wide-bulging eyes and clamping mouth and ingrown canine teeth, which are known as Jasmine-canines.<sup>61</sup> He wears a peaked crown, a so-called *Yodbut* crown. This crown refers to the position of the prince or the son of the king. Because Inthorachit is half demon and half

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<sup>61</sup> Jasmine-canines have the same shape as budding-jasmines. This canine symbolises children or young people, usually utilised for a teenage demon character. Because of Inthorachit being the son and heir of Tosakanth, who has had intelligence, courage, and supernatural power since a young age, this particular symbol was created for this unique character.



human, this role is not regularly associated with demons. According to *khon* tradition, this role is connected with some human characteristics, such as the human earlobes and his dance movements. Moreover, in the episode of his transformation into the god Indra, he also wears the Indra crown jewel. For *Black and White*, Inthorachit has minimal decoration on his crown with human earlobes and their decorations. Both of his budding canines remain as his signature since most demons would have high bent-upward fangs.



Figure 5.10 The traditional *khon* mask of Inthorachit (left)



Figure 5.11 Inthorachit mask of *Black and White* (right)

#### 5.4.4 Akattalai Mask

*Akattalai* is the female demon. The mask traditionally has four faces and a red complexion. One normal face is in front and three other small faces are at the back of the mask. Her eyes are wide open, attentive, and mischievous. She grins

with her long, upward fangs and wears a crown with five gourd tops. *Akattalai* is the footman soldier, who fought with Hanuman while she was on her tour of duty. *Akattalai* thwarted Hanuman to go to Longka finally, and Hanuman used his trident to kill her.

In *Black and White*, the mask maker chose her signature, a five gourd-top crown from the traditional *khon* mask for the recreation. The designer categorised the *Akattalai* character to be in the white troop; thus the mask was painted in a white colour. To represent this mask as a female character, the mask maker decorated the diamond necklace hanging around the back of the mask to look like female hair.

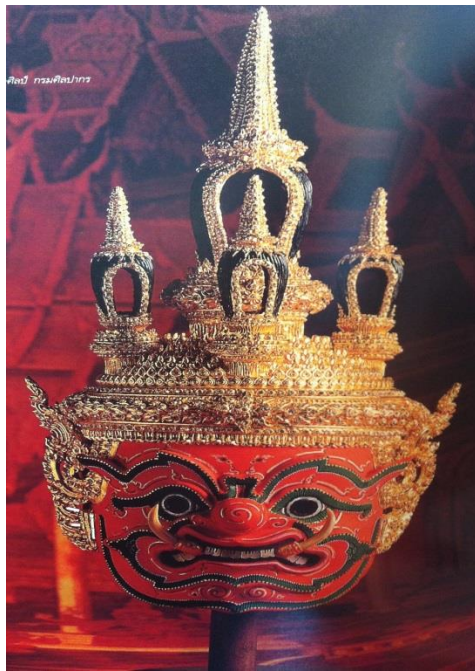


Figure 5.12 The traditional *khon* mask of Akattalai (left)

Figure 5.13 Akattalai of *Black and White* (right)

#### 5.4.5 Hanuman Mask

In traditional style, Hanuman is the magical white monkey warrior in Rama's simian army. His complexion is white. The mask is white with whorls of hair. He wears a golden garland or diadem as his head ornament with earpieces. He grins with outstretched mouth revealing the symbol of the moon, surrounded by stars on his upper palate. There are various styles of Hanuman masks for the enactment of this role in Khon. Each mask is suitable for a particular episode of *Ramakien*. For instance, *Hanuman the Almighty* displays his supernatural power as a god incarnate. This mask sports four faces, the major one in the front covering the performer's face and other three small faces at the back. In addition, for *Hanuman the Crown Prince* and *Hanuman the King*, these two masks wear the high level of the royal crown when Thosakanth elevates him to the position of the Crown Prince of Longka and gives him the regalia of Inthorachit. The mask of *Hanuman the Crown Prince* wears the same peaked crown as Inthorachit's mask. After the victorious end of the war, Rama rewards the kingship of the vassal state of Ayodhya to Hanuman. Thus, the mask of *Hanuman the King* wears the sharp-pointed crown as Rama. Eventually, *Hanuman the Hermit* wears the appropriate hermit headgear to display in the episode of his ordination. For *Black and White*, the mask of Hanuman emphasises his complexion in white, the structure of hairstyle and head ornament. The mask displays his snake's fang and outstretched mouth. The shape of the mouth makes this monkey mask different from the demon masks, which mostly have clamping mouths with protruding fangs.



Figure 5.14 The traditional Hanuman mask made of pearl shells (left)



Figure 5.15 Hanuman mask of *Black and White* (right)

The selection of these *khon* characters has been considered as major raw material for the creative process of mask making. Under this circumstance, the mask designer reduced and modified some of the symbols of each character from traditional *khon* masks. However, some of the codes of the individual *khon* characters still remain but only as a way of deconstruction of the mask making in order to break the ground of the traditional *khon* mask's appearances. At this moment, four out of the five *Black and White's* masks (Kumphakan, Hanuman, Tosakanth and Inthorachit) have been sold to display at the new Vienna World Museum<sup>62</sup> (*Weltmuseum Wien*). These Klunchun's masterpieces became part of

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<sup>62</sup> Vienna World Museum was previously the Ethnology Museum ('Völkerkundemuseum') in Austria. It was renamed the "World Museum" ('Weltmuseum'). This new museum has a new logo and a new homepage <http://www.weltmuseumwien.at/>



the art collection in the museum under the exhibition entitled “*Dance Creation: Asia’s Mythical Past and Living Present*” during 17 April to 30 September 2013 and also became a new history of *khon* performance.



Figure 5.16 Front cover of catalog of *Danced Creation* Exhibition

### **5.5 The Costumes and Props in *Black and White***

I will now consider the juxtaposition and comparison between the classical *khon* costumes and modern costumes of *Black and White*. The other costume designs and additional props in the show are further discussed. We will see the way in which Klunchun develops and transforms his contemporary interpretation through the creative costumes in *Black and White*.

Some of the elements of *khon* costume and its presentation styles were derived from the ritual performance of *Chak Nak Duekdamban* (the churning of the

milky ocean). According to Thai Palatine Law, this ritual was held during the reign of King Ramathibodi II, B.E. 2039/ A.D 1496 in the Ayutthaya period. This ritual was the first royal activity of the *Indraphisek*<sup>63</sup> ceremony (Poopongpan 149). The story of *Chak Nak Duekdamban* demonstrates the power of Indra (the leader of the Devas or gods). Indra sits on top of Mount Meru<sup>64</sup> (Sumeru Mountain) and is encircled with a seven-headed Naga (serpent). Naga was pulled by hundreds of different characters. Civil officials, dressed as 100 *asuras* (demon or Yaksa in Thai), pull the head of ancient Naga while the military official or royal pages represent 100 *devatas* (gods) and 103 monkey characters pull the Naga's tail (Poopongpan 150). These various characters of *Ramakien* contribute to the scene of the Hindu creation myth *Churning of the Milky Ocean*. This important ceremony was used particularly for the inauguration of the Siamese King. It was aimed at presenting the power of Indra as a symbol of the divine king of Siam, who is the greatest god and can conquer the asura or demon (Na Bangchang 81, Wanliphodom 97, 103 and Wongthes 154). In other Southeast Asian courts, similar forms of this ritual ceremony were also performed, for example, at the courts of Pagan, in Angkor, and in East Java.

The birth of *khon* was deciphered and related to this grandiose coronation ceremony. The fighting scene in *Churning of the Milky Ocean* required hundreds

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<sup>63</sup> *Indraphisek* is a ceremony to indicate power and to elevate the status of the king as high as Indra god.

<sup>64</sup> Mount Meru is a sacred mountain in Hindu and Buddhist cosmology where Indra god dwel. It is also called Sumeru (Sanskrit) and Sineru (Pāli).

of costumes for the different characters. This background displays the origin of *Khon* costumes and its development. Today's traditional *khon* costumes seem to have remained unchanged during consecutive generations. They were preserved and made to resemble those used in the past. However, these classical costumes have been continuously developed and modified throughout the centuries. The *khon* costumes are a creative art, elaborately developed and refined until today for stage performance. The *khon* costumes have been categorised as a fine art and decorative art. The *khon* costumes for a royal character have different kinds of ornaments. It has developed by imitating some of the elements and patterns of royal costumes. As such, the sharp-pointed crown or a coronet, the embroidered tight-fitting jacket, the brocaded pair of breeches, the loincloth, the broad sash including assorted ornaments and jewelry indicating the rank and title of the characters have sprung from regal Thai attire.



Chart III  
Attire for a Demoniac Rôle

Figure 5.17 The traditional *khon* costume for the demon character



The above drawing<sup>65</sup> illustrates the exemplar *khon* costume of a male demon character, *Tosakanth*. The structure of the outfit, accessories, and details of the patterns are primary materials for the creative design of the costume in the *Black and White* performance. This traditional dress from classical dance contributed to the accurate interpretation of this branch of national art (Dhani Nivat 139). The chart of the demon character's *khon* costumes and ornaments consists of the following:

1. *Kam lai thao* (anklet)
2. *Sa nap phlao* (tight-fitting drawers)
3. *Pha nung* (nether garment)
4. *Hoi khang* (embroidered cloth used like a belt, but with its ends hanging down to the knees, one at the front of each leg)
5. *Hoi kon* (loin cloth)
6. *Sua or kroh* (upper garment or armor)
7. *Rat sa ew* (waistband)
8. *Hoi na* (Cloth hanging down from the waist between the ends of *Hoi khang*)
9. *Khem khat* (belt)
10. *Rat ok* (chest band)
11. *In tha nu* (epaulette)

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<sup>65</sup> This illustration came from the original block used in the Fine Arts Journal, produced by Dhanit Yupho, the head of the Entertainment Section of the Fine Arts Department. It was reproduced and described by Prince Dhani Nivat in his article entitled "Traditional Dress in the Classic Dance of Siam", p.143.

12. *Khrongsaw or nuam khaw* (ornament worn around the body on a level with the shoulders)
13. *Thapsuang* (pendant)
14. *Sang wan* (golden chain worn from the shoulder to the opposite hip)
15. *Tap thit* (plate attached to sang wan where the latter touches the hip)
16. *Waen rawp* (bracelet, which is a coiled spring bent into a circle)
17. *Pa wa lam* (bracelet of beads)
18. *Shong korn* (ornament for the forearm which looks like a row of bangles fused together)
19. *Phuangpra kam* (necklace of beads)
20. *Hua khon* (mask of Tosakanth)
21. *Tham ma rong* (finger-ring)
22. *Sawn or Khan sawn* (bow)

In *Black and White* (2011), all of the costumes were designed by Anutep Pojprasat, excepted the dress for the female role, which was created by Pichet Klunchun. The modern attire in *Black and White* draws on the inspiration and deconstruction of the traditional *khon* costume. The structure, pattern, and Thai motifs of the traditional costume were recreated and reinvented through Klunchun's interpretation of *Ramakein*. In terms of costume, *Black and White* is divided into two main parts.

In the first section of the show all dancers wear in a fully-modern style of *khon* costumes. Four male dancers and Klunchun wear masks well suited for the distinguishing costumes. Similar to the female dancer wear the avant-garde dress

with special weapons. The art of embellishment and costume making in *Black and White* is the same process used for the ancient traditional *khon* costume. However the creative design and the material are innovative. The Thai motifs for the traditional *khon* costume such as the flower, flame, Narasingh<sup>66</sup> face were modified to be embroidered with glittery silver thread. As a consequence, this dance work does not intent to perform or narrate a particular character or some episodes of *Ramakien*. The specific colour and details of *Ramakien*'s characters are eliminated and are monochrome. The designer merely focuses on the structure and patterns of the demon costume.

In the second part of the show, on the other hand, some dancers took their full costumes off. Four male dancers chaged their costumes to be nearly naked by wearing only flesh-coloured trunks for the performance. This visalisation represents the abstract concept of the dance and allows the audience to pay attention to the pure dance movement rather than the illusion of tasteful and exquisite costumes.

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<sup>66</sup> Narasingh or Narasimha is an avatar of Vishnu, the Hindu god. This character is visualised as half-man/half-lion. He has a human-like torso and lower body while his face and claws are lion-like. The Narasingh-faced design is usually used for the traditional costume of Tosokanth, the demon character.



Figure 5.18: The six dancers wear full modern costumes of *Black and White*



Figure 5.19: The four dancers in the second part of the show wear flesh-coloured trunks representing the abstract concept of dance.

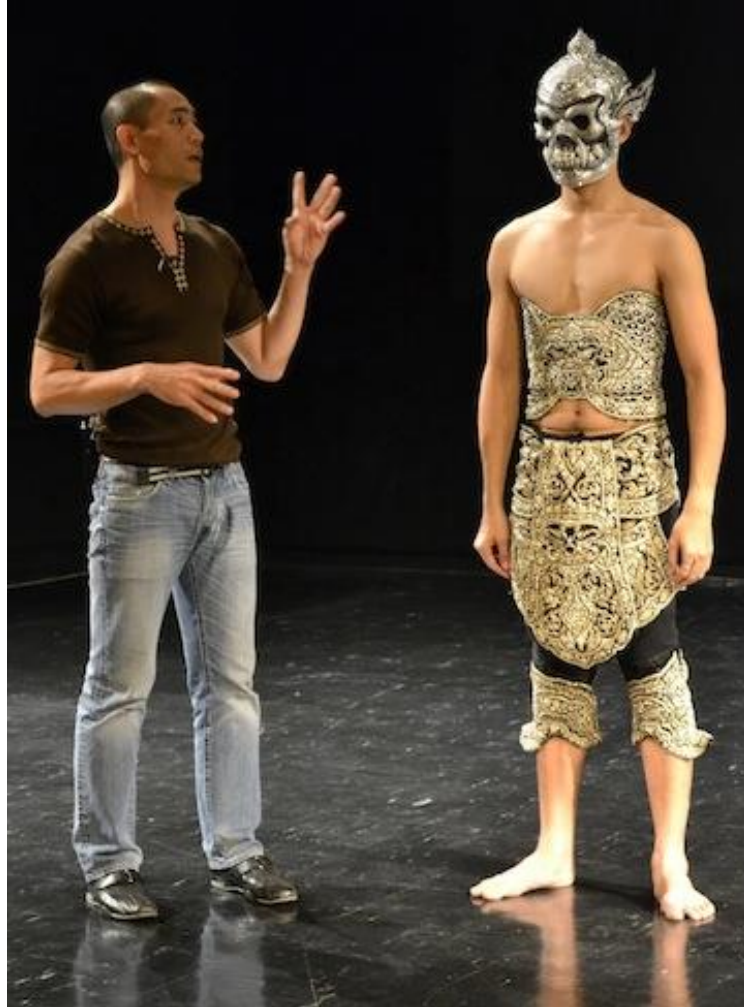


Figure 5.20 Klunchun (left) explains the male costumes of *Black and White* modeled by Porramet Maneerat in Klunchun's seminar at Thammasat University.

The previous figure demonstrates the modern *khon* costume of the male dancers in *Black and White*. It is composed of the mask, the chest band, the waistband with a loincloth, and the drawers. The following section provides each piece of these modern costumes compared with the traditional *khon* attire, confirming how to do creative work based on traditional materials.

### 5.5.1 Rat Ok (No.10 in Figure 5.17)

*Rat Ok* is a brocaded chest band on the *khon* costume. This embroidered breast-piece is worn across the breast of a dancer covering a tight-fitting jacket in traditional *khon*. Traditionally, the tight-fitting jacket of the male demon characters is differentiated between the colours of the coat or bodice and the long sleeves. This differentiation of the coat's colour and *Rat Ok* represents armor. These costumes indicate being a great warrior of those characters used specifically for leading male and demon characters in the war scene such as the roles of Rama and Tosakanth.

In *Black and White*, the designer adapted and enlarged the scale of the chest band to be corset-like. It covered and was close fitting on the dancers' flesh. This modern chest band is of three different kinds: a skull design for Klunchun, and monkey-faced and demon-faced designs for other male dancers. The costume creators applied attractive Thai motifs from traditional costumes such as a flower, a flame, and monkey's hair to embroider in his design.



Figure 5.21 The *Rat Ok* in a monkey-faced design for male dancers



### 5.5.2 Sa nap phlao (No.2 in Figure 5.17)

In the traditional khon costume, the male, demon, and monkey roles wear tight-fitting drawers called *Sa nap phlao* in Thai. These drawers resemble a pair of breeches, fitted narrowly to the knee and calf. Traditional breeches used plain colours depending on each *khon* character. It is covered by *panung* (No.3 in Figure 5.17), which is a brocaded cloth worn in a special way depending on the types of characters (the regal human male, male demon or monkey). *Sa nap phlao* is embroidered beneath the knees with gold and metallic thread. The tips of the pants are slightly curved upward to symbolise the high rank of the principal characters while the straight tips represent general characters.

In *Black and White*, all of the male dancers wear white and black spandex drawers instead of satin or cotton fabric. It is more comfortable and flexible to move in these than traditional drawers. The decoration at the tip of the pants is inspired by the curved edges of the classical costume. These are embroidered with silver thread on the skull design patterns.



Figure 5.22 The curved tips of *Sa nap phlao* represent the high-ranking character



Figure 5.23 The curved tips of the spandex pants embroidered with silver thread in the skull design patterns

### 5.5.3 *Rat sa ew* (No.7in Figure 5.17)

*Rat sa ew* is the waistband of the traditional *khon* costume. The ancient style used a long straight pattern. Today's waistband uses a curved-edge pattern (Figure 5.24) instead and is made of contrasting colour of satin fabric. It was created by Khom Silapakorn, The Fine Arts Department, Thailand.



Figure 5.24 *Rat sa ew* in today's *khon* and *lakorn* performances



#### **5.5.4 Hoi-Na and Hoi-Khang** (No.8 and No.4 in Figure 5.17 respectively)

*Hoi-Na Hoi-Khang* or *Chaywai ChayKreng* is the name of an ancient Thai costume item, cloth pieces or ornaments used to cover the front of the legs. It is believed that this piece of costume was adapted from the ends of the sash hanging down in the front of the legs, one of the costumes of the Siamese King and royal family. The original *Chaywai ChayKreng* was made of gold with a carved pattern and engraved gems. The *Khon* and *lakorn* performances were influenced by and adapted this ornament to create the costumes. However, the performance costumes have been embroidered onto a fabric and are different from the original.

*Hoi Na (Chai Wai)* (No.8 in Figure 5.17) is a front loincloth hanging down from the waist. This is one additional piece of embroidered fabric that covers the two of side loincloths named *Hoi Khang*. *Hoi Na* can be created in different patterns. It can use the pattern of Suwankathob<sup>67</sup> and can be embroidered in yellow (Suntranon 119).

*Hoi Khang (Chia kreng)* (No.4 in Figure 5.17) is an embroidered cloth used like a belt. It hangs down to the knees, one at the front of each leg of the performer. It has two kinds of ends: straight and curved. The curved loincloth is used

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<sup>67</sup> Suwankathob is a piece of decoration of the costume of the Siamese King made from gold. The *khon* and *lakorn* performance began the original ornament to cover the front of the loincloth (*Hoi Na*). In the later period, the design of Suwankathob was imitated into the piece of the front loincloth. Traditionally the loincloth with Suwankathob's pattern had to be used with the curved pattern of the side loincloths (*Hoi Khang*) to represent the role of the royal character in *khon* (Suntranon 101).

specifically for god or the royal male characters of Ramakien while the straight loincloth is used for the demon monkey characters.

Figure 5.25 shows that the original *Chia Kren* is a gold ornament of the King of Siam's costume. This decoration is used to cover the front of legs, while in Figure 5.26 is the curved *Chia Kren* with the Suwankathob ornament in between.



Figure 5.25 *Chia Kren* (Hoi Khang)



Figure 5.26 The *Chia Kren* with the Suwankathob ornament

The curved patterns of *Hoi Khang* were adapted from the male character costume of *Lakorn Troupe of Prince Narathip* in period of King Chulalongkorn (RamaV), created by The Fine Arts Department (Krom Silapakorn), Thailand (Suntranon 85)—see Figure 5.27. This special *khon* costume is used only for god or the royal characters: *Hoi Na* (front loincloth) with a yellow design of Suwankathob (above), *Hoi Khang* (side cloth pieces) with the curved pattern (in Suntranon 101).



Figure 5.27 The Fine Arts Department's design of *Hoi Na* (front loincloth) and *Hoi Khang*

#### 5.5.5 Hoi Kon (No.5 in Figure 5.17)

*Hoi Kon* is a back loincloth. This costume is used especially for the demon and monkey characters in the *khon* performance. For the demon role, it is regularly designed in a Narasingh-faced pattern. For the monkey role, this piece is tied with the tail of a monkey.



Figure 5.28 *Hoi Kon* for the demon character (left) and for the monkey character (right)

There are many separate pieces of costumes which are decorated on the lower part of the dancers' body in the traditional style of *khon*. As a result, the *Black and White*'s costumes were integrated in these isolated costumes in one piece in which the dancers could comfortably dress themselves. *Rat sa ew*, *Hoi-Na*, *Hoi-Khang*<sup>31</sup> and *Hoi Kon* were reduced in scale and included as one waistband. There are two different designs: Narasingh-faced and skull motifs. These elaborate waistbands were embellished with silver thread on black and white background cloth. The Narasingh-faced design was of a Thai flower motif similar to the traditional design of the *khon* costume. Four male dancers wear this design in the first section of the *Black and White* performance, while Pichet Klunchun wears a special skull design decorated with a flame motif in the Thai style.



Figure 5.29 The monkey-faced design and flower motifs of the waistband for the male dancers in *Black and White*

## 5.6 The Male Black Demon Character and Its Costume for Pichet Klunchun



Figure 5.30 Klunchun's costume and his weapon, a long metal rod

The *khon* characters are elaborately decorated with each piece of embellishment, with the mask and the headdress specifically designated for a particular character. In the show, Klunchun is performed as the special dead character. He wears the modern demon *khon* mask (Kumphakan mask, Figure 5.7). His modern costume is very distinctive and stylish with the skull motif, while the other male dancers wear monkey-faced or demon-faced designs instead. This skull pattern is elaborately embroidered on the chest band, waistband, loincloth as well as the border of the drawers of Klunchun's costume.





Figure 5.31 Klunchun exhibits his skull-design costumes

In Figure 5.31, Klunchun demonstrates his skull-design costumes: the chest band (left) and waistband integrating a back loincloth (right) in his seminar at Thammasat University. His character represents the symbols of black, death, masculinity and demon opposed to his partner, the female character. In addition, there are diverse kinds of weapons employed to differentiate the characters. This character may be recognised by his remarkable weapon; the massive long aluminium rod, which is brought into play. The rod reminds us of the spear, which is Kumpakan's weapon in the traditional *khon* performance. This long pole can be a sex symbol of the male depending on the interpretations of the viewers (Klunchun, personal 2013).



Figure 5.32 The skull-design of the front loincloth (left) and back loincloth (right)

This distinguishing design shows how the designer reconstructs the traditional costume and its functions. In addition, his reinterpretation of the reconstruction of some of the Thai motifs to be integrated with the skull design indicates the way in which the creators represent Thai identity through their art works.

### **5.7 The Female Character and Her Costume**

The female character in this performance has an interesting role. There was no female character during the first rehearsal of *Black and White* until Kornkarn Rungsawang came; a female dancer participated in the rehearsal by coincidence. After rehearsing for a while, her role was created as the only female character in the dance piece. With her strong character, she was employed as a full-time professional dancer of the company at that time until the present.

At first, her striking costume during the rehearsal at the studio company was a white long wedding dress. She concealed her entire head by wearing a white



see-through lace mask. She walked slowly in circles with the elegant movement on her four-inch glass-platform high heels. At that time, she carried a wooden pole as her weapon. This outstanding visualisation was very impressive. The costume of her character was not involved with the traditional *khon* costume at all. The female regal character of the *khon* performance usually dresses in an embroidered nether garment worn like a skirt, with the upper garment draped over the shoulder by the embroidered shawl. This royal character must wear high-point crowns or coronets and a number of rich ornaments. However, using a lace mask for the performance seems to be one familiar element of the *khon* performance. On the other hand, the gods and male and female characters in the traditional *khon* nowadays do not have to wear the masks but they do makeup instead.

Nevertheless, this costume pattern was totally altered after the company started to rehearse at the festival's residence at Esplanade in Singapore. The costume was changed to a white see-through lace bodysuit. The dance dramaturge suggested this costume because it could express the physical movement of the dancer better than the previous one. In addition, performing with a wedding dress might guide the audience toward the wrong interpretation of the story because there are many different implications of the wedding dress in diverse cultures.

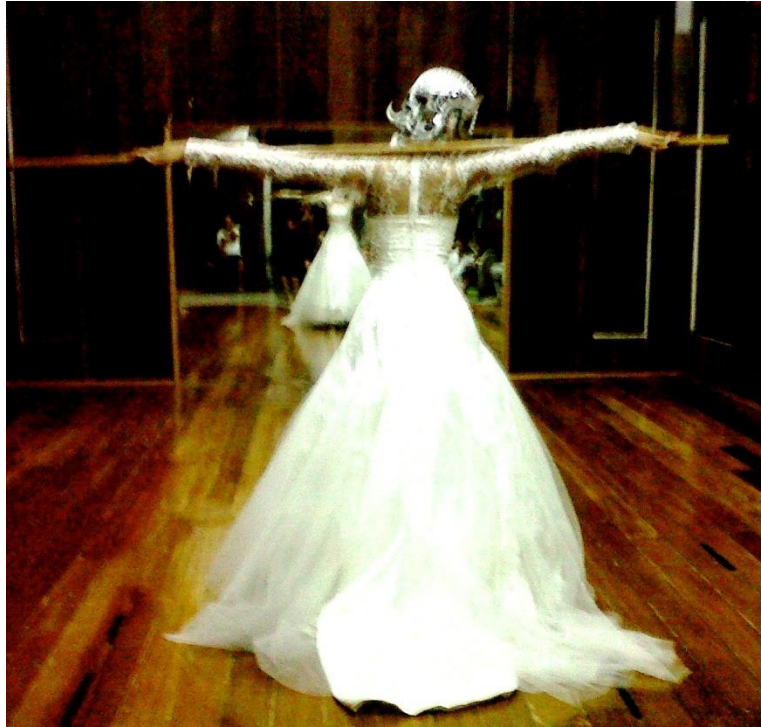


Figure 5.33 The experiment of the long wedding costume for the female character

While the male demon character uses a long rod as his weapon, silver long-pointed nails were invented for the female character. Artificial nails are used in various kinds of performing arts in Thailand. As such, *Fon-Lep* (fingernail dance) in the North, *Fon Phu Thai* in the Northeast and *Nora* in the South of the country—all of these performances use long artificial nails for performances. Klunchun created these props or weapons to be symbols of sex: “The nail is a symbol of a woman while a long pole is a symbol of a man” (Klunchun 2013). It is noticeable that the pointed nails in this performance can be symbolised as a form of beauty and femininity. On the other side, it can be a weapon to show fearfulness. As a consequence, it demonstrates that “beauty is the most powerful weapon of a woman” (Klunchun 2013).



Figure 5.34 The costume of the female character with long sharp nails

## Conclusion

Pichet Klunchun is a very prominent artist who has been awarded and feted more by international critics and spectators than by domestic viewers. There are not many contemporary artists nowadays that have shown a deep interest in *khon* (Thai classical masked dance-drama) or created dance works based on this art form. Pichet Klunchun's achievement and recognition from the international stage and dance festivals have led him to be considered a groundbreaker and a role model by Thai dancers who aspire to continue and follow his passion as a professional dancer under the label of "*khon* dancer".

Tracing his biography and chronicling his dance education and theatrical experiences have shown his mastery in applying and adapting his accumulated performance knowledge to improving his artistic dance creations. To recap: at first, he was individually trained as a *khon* dancer by Master Chaiyot Kunmanee at the age of sixteen. He then studied Thai dance at The Department of Dance, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. During his period as a university student, he continuously practiced Thai dance in both distinctive genres—*khon*, (masked play) and *lakorn* (dance-drama). He asserts: "My blood as a *khon* dancer could be blended with the dance knowledge of *lakorn* styles. This is an advantage compared to other students who learn only *khon* or *lakorn* performances" (Klunchun, Feb 2013). Moreover, he also learned some subjects related to modern spoken theatre such as acting and directing. These dramatic skills have allowed him to better analyse and interpret in delicate detail the *khon*-character whenever he performed. It is unsurprising that he is keen on these

theatrical practices, as these have helped him to improve himself and become a charismatic dancer.

After his graduation, he continued to work with many Thai and internationally-acclaimed directors. Damrhung supported him to be a university dance lecturer. He taught for a few years until he was granted an Asian Cultural Council scholarship to study dance in the United States. This moment was a turning point in his life. He came back to Thailand and challenged himself to be a professional dance artist by resigning from the university. He established the dance troupe entitled Life Work Company in 2004. This company was renamed as the Pichet Klunchun Dance Company in 2009. After more than ten years, his dance creations and the company have developed and survived. At present, this is the first dance company in Thailand that can employ full-time professional dancers to create dance works.

He and the company members have sometimes encountered negative responses from domestic conservative audiences and artists because his contemporary dance works often go against the *khon* traditions. For instance, in *I am a Demon* (2005) and *Black and White* (2011), Klunchun and the male dancers wore only flesh-skin coloured trunks. This unfamiliar costume and presentation were unconventional for conservative audiences. It seemed that his creations demolished the “high art” form of *khon*. However, his radical dance works frequently question the audience on the differences between conservation and development of the *khon* performance. Indeed, *khon* is presently regarded as a national heritage and national identity, which has been preserved without much

change. From the conservative Thai society perspective, the *khon* dance form is an untouchable and unchangeable cultural form. However, these conservative viewpoints on Thai dance cannot be utilised in the present time. In fact, all cultures change over time for many different reasons. If Thai dance cannot change and develop in some ways it will be obsolete and extinct for today's contemporary society.

Klunchun oftentimes provokes his audiences to reconsider and re-examine Thai dance in its different aspects. This has been evident by statements such as "I am going to do cultural war" and "my work is an opening game with the old culture [Thai dance]" (Klunchun, 2003). It is a narrow perspective to consider *khon* only as a high art form. Conventional awareness believes it must adhere to a stereotype of the classical form of performance. Looked at from an alternative way, however, we reconsider it as a source for dance movement or a universal language. *Khon* dancing then can become a common ground to be shared with an extensive international audience. This way of thinking is a completely different awareness and understanding of *khon*. With Klunchun, we re-examine it in specific details separated from the traditions and beliefs surrounding it.

The most fascinating aspects in studying Pichet Klunchun and his dance company are his innovative and creative process in dance making. His dance work *Black and White* (2011) demonstrates diverse stylised elements and theatrical presentations of *khon*. It demonstrates how Thai masked dance-drama can be reinvented, reconstructed, and reimagined in contemporary contexts. The artistic work can communicate messages and stories other than the narrative of

Ramakien. Klunchun's development of *khon* dancing and his reinterpretation of the *khon* tradition has both challenged and reinvigorated contemporary audiences. Of course, Klunchun has distorted *khon* dancing to some extent, as he wanted to target broader international audiences and not only Thai people.

Black-and-white can refer to monochrome forms of visual arts such as photography. Since the advent and emergence of colour pictures, black-and-white can represent something ancient, historic, and nostalgic. In *Black and White* (2011), Klunchun draws on the two-dimensional monochrome mural paintings of the battle scene in Ramakien. The fighting postures of the *khon* characters from the paintings were imitated and co-exist with the application of traditional *khon* fighting postures. In the end, he created a three-dimensional visualisation of modern *khon* choreography. This dance innovation is a new phenomenon that can be designated as "modern *khon* dance". It is not a hybrid dance form or "*khon* contact improvisation" as some critics have tried to define it because in the choreographic process, he did not adopt any Western dance technique to explore. Rather, he paid attention to the specific details of *khon* movements, particularly the fighting position and dance. Hence, it can be concluded that the choreography directly sprang from the original *khon* movements rather than the choreographic process of hybridity in different forms of dance.

A study of Klunchun's modern take on *khon* dance and his legacy are significant for Thai dance academia and education. His modern *khon* dance can be adopted and taught in institutes in Thailand in order to develop the next generation of Thai dancers. Pichet Klunchun's dance creations, particularly *Black*

*and White*, are not only contributions to the development of Thai dance, but also an innovation in the dance world. At present he is not only a Thai *khon* dancer; he is one of the most internationally prominent dance artist, who harmonises Thai classical dance language with contemporary sensibility in order to promote the Thai dance scene at the international level.



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