

The Inheritance of Beliefs and Ethnic Groups: A Case Study of Lakhon Nai

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Received: January 22, 2024; **Revised:** February 19, 2024; **Accepted:** February 24, 2024

ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the relationship between the beliefs and ethnic groups, and the inheritance of belief in Lakhon Nai, a Thai traditional drama performed for the royal family. The scope of the study is based on the First Three Thai Enacted laws, heritage studies, and records of the performance run by the Fine Arts Department from 1782 to 2021. The information was obtained in the forms of media records, related documents, and interviews with the specialists including the researcher's experience in learning and teaching pedagogies, and her performance. It is found that Lakhon Nai has been used to record the history of the kings, country, and conventional practice as described in the First Three Thai Enacted laws. The content portrayed the story of protagonists, their leadership, and their visions in the Royal Thai Court and society. It can be stated that the theme of beliefs and ethnic groups have been adjusted to be compatible with the local Thai custom resulting in Lakhon Nai's identity. The theme and function of the show were inseparable. The alteration of society, ethnic group population, beliefs, and dancing styles did not affect the leader's vision. Trust and respect dedicated to the instructor have played an important role in traditional preservation including practical and performance absorption. These findings can enhance Thai cultural preservation, traditionally dramatic inheritance, and policy dissemination.

Keywords: Inheritance, Belief, Nation, Lakhon Nai, Performing Arts, Thai Culture

Introduction

Lakhon Nai is a dramatic dance portraying stories of leaders, royal courts, social situations, and the government's policy in Thailand. Those Lakhon Nai stories are related to the First Three Thai Enacted laws. The changes of leaders, societies, and the government had an influential effect on Lakhon Nai's dramatic pattern significantly like what had happened to the country during its revolution time (Vasinaron, 2019). Despite the changes, Lakhon Nai has been passed down from generation to generation over time and has been listed in the academic lessons until now.

It is assumed that Lakhon Nai originated in Ayutthaya's period as evidence found in the First Three Thai Enacted laws and Thai Literature Bunnawat Kham Chan. It consisted of four stories: Ramayana, Aunnarut, Panji tales, and Dalhang. In Ayutthaya's time, the actors performed in Lakhon Nai can be both males and females, but they have to perform in separate genders. The performance convention was still ambiguous as there was no precise pattern for this type of drama. Until Thonburee's period, King Taksin the Great composed four acts of Ramayana: Archery Competition of Phra Mongkut, The Flirting of Hanuman on Nang Varin, The Judgement of Maleevaraj, and The Spell Cast by Ravana, the king of Lanka, at the foot of Suamne Mount. Furthermore, the king ordered Chaopraya Nakornsithammarat, one of the noblemen, and his female troupe to restore the royal drama resulting in his greater important role in the royal dramatic shows. In the Rattanakosin period, King Rama the 1st ordered to adjust the First Three Thai Enacted laws and restore the traditional culture leading to the inheritance of Lakhon Nai and Thai dramatic literature. Later on, King Rama the 2nd adjusted Lakhon Nai pieces of literature: Aunnarut and Ramayana. He initiated the presentation of Lakhon Nai outside

the royal house and a headset design, Panjuret (Kongthaworn, 2020). After that, King Rama the 3rd terminated the royal female drama, Lakhon Nai, but this dramatic show had been widely supported by elite groups as they would like to conserve the national heritage. Consequently, King Rama the 4th decreed his order to restore Lakhon Nai female shows inside and outside the royal palace. Subsequently, these shows were taxed and had been revived through private dramatic theatres substantially. Those shows' quality had been controlled by the tax system. Moreover, the king composed the prelude of golden and silver trees dance, Arjuna act, Mekhala and Ramasune (the thunder giant) act, Ramayana: Rama wandering in the jungle act, Lord Narayana subdued Nondhuk act, and Viradh entering the Phawathong jungle (Virulrak, 2000). From the reign of King Rama the 5th, the government and law systems have been adjusted resulting in the termination of the First Three Thai Enacted laws. However, Lakorn Nai and its convention have been preserved in the academic lesson plans and performed until present days owing to the trust in the instructors' skills. Thus, Lakhon Nai and its history have been recorded in the instructors' memory since then (Vasinarom, 2012).

Since the documents about the inheritance of beliefs and ethnic groups in Lakhon Nai have been scattered in a disarrayed manner and the information has never been aligned appropriately, the history of Thai drama remained unclear. Therefore, the researcher aimed to study the inheritance and relationship between belief and ethnic groups as found in the First Three Thai Enacted laws in the hope that this study would bring the Thai dramatic history to the light in a more systematic way and can be developed intertwined with another field of study.

Research objectives

1. To study the relationship between beliefs and ethnic groups revealed in Lakhon Nai.
2. To study the inheritance of beliefs and ethnic groups.

Research methodology

This study has been conducted as qualitative research.

a. Scope of Study

- Beliefs and ethnic groups found in the First Three Thai Enacted laws
- Heritage studies of Lakhon Nai.
- Records of the performance run by the Fine Arts Department from 1782 to 2021.

b. The researcher has studied based on related information below.

● Official and historical documents: the First Three Thai Enacted laws, official announcement, historical record, National Archives, and the government gazette.

- Related textbooks and research studies.

● Interviews have been made with national artists and specialists in the field of traditional dance, law, and history such as Emeritus Professor Dr. Surapone Virulrak, Ms. Suwannee Chalanukhroa Chair of the Royal Institute, Ms. Venika Bunnark, Ms. Rattana Puangprayong.

- Observation from the recorded and live performances, and traditional dancing class.
- Self-training by the specialists, teaching experience, and self-performance.

c. Research tools consisted of record forms, surveys, interview forms, and observation forms.

The researcher has utilized all data obtained to contribute her analysis. She also ordered the sequences of the events in the form of an almanac and categorized the play components. As well as this, the relationship between beliefs and ethnic groups as appeared in the First Three Thai Enacted laws and the factors affecting the inheritance have been included. Finally, this research study has been presented in descriptive analysis.

Findings

Fine arts and dancing performances have been used as tools to inherit the belief, rituals, conventions, and to distribute leaders' policies. This legacy has been passed from the ancient to the descendants until this becomes habitual practice, and custom (Vasinarom, 2018). Likewise, Lakhon Nai has served similar functions. Three critical points have been reviewed as follows: Lakhon Nai, belief, and ethnic groups as found in the First Three Thai Enacted laws.

1. Lakhon Nai

There are five topics to be studied about Lakhon Nai: gestures, performance arrangement, development, content, and dissemination.

1. The gesture of the Characters in the play.

Those gestures have been passed down from the former famous performers who performed the show on particular occasions. Moreover, the gestures have been enlisted in the school curriculum. It is found that the gestures have been adapted based on the personalities of the students, the ability of the actors and instructors, and the chances of training (Kongthaworn, 2019).

2. Performance Arrangement

Lakhon Nai's literature is so long that the content of the play needs to be segmented into various acts or series. Most popular acts are always continuously performed including miscellaneous acts. Some acts have been used as a test or performed on special occasions, such as a solo dancing of Benjagai (Churd-Ching Benjagai), the couple dancing Supaluck Aum Som, Inao cutting the flower with his shining dagger, Bussaba visiting the shrine, Brahmas Dancing, and Mekhala and Ramasune dancing, etc.

3. Lakhon Nai Development

Lakhon Nai is one of several traditional Thai dramas taking place during the Rattanakosin period. Although it is called in various names, the real definition is a play performed by a troupe of maidens in the royal palace and supported by the king. The first evidence appeared in Thai Literature Bunnawat Kham Chan which recited Anirudh and Panjit Tales when Ayutthaya lost its kingdom to Burma's troops in 1767. This caused the royal play to dissipate into many areas. For example, Lakhon Nai played by prisoners of war in Burma was performed in the Yodia play. In the Thonburi period, there were two Lakhon Nai groups: the royal maiden group and a group arranged by Chaopraya Nakornsithammarat under the king's permission. Later, Lakhon Nai altered its forms and performances in many elements in the early Rattanakosin period. During the reign of King Rama the 1st, it was a country's restoration time, so Lakhon Nai was one to be restored according to the ancient convention from the Ayutthaya period. This encourages this kind of drama to be one of national legacy. Later, King Rama the 2nd composed new play scripts for Lakhon Nai whose actresses had to practice gestures repetitively to deliver the harmony of the traditional drama. The actresses of this time became Lakhon Nai's instructors thereafter. This allowed Lakhon Nai's conventions and patterns to be a role model of the traditional drama in the following period. Since King Rama the 4th allowed Lakhon Nai to be performed widely outside the palace, the noblemen started to organize a play production for their entertainment. It can be concluded that policies from the leaders could play an influential role in the development of Lakhon Nai including the foreign interference, social and economic situations. The solid background of Lakhon Nai's convention became a stepping stone for the later development and the creation of other traditional dramas (Kongthaworn, 2019).

4. Content of Lakhon Nai

The content has been adjusted according to the policy and the leader's opinions. The themes revolved around the protagonists' roles, the country's situations and ideas, the solution of the social problems, and the leader's governance skills to declare the peaceful order and elevate the country's prosperity. The king or the leader maintained double statuses: mandate of heaven and mandate of dharma who could extend his realm widely as can be seen for the myriad of ethnic groups in Lakhon

Nai and its elements: songs, costumes, and scripts. Moreover, the convention has been strict to the rules as Lakhon Nai has been held for the king in the royal palace, so the performers have to practice heavily, and the funds have been spent excessively to create a luxurious feeling to the audiences.

5. Dissemination

The performance can be organized at regular times and on special occasions to reflect the global and domestic situations. As well as this, Lakhon Nai has been enlisted in the education syllabus resulting in its development in later times and live performance records as appeared on social media platforms.

Thus, history and government administration can be learned through Lakhon Nai because it has recorded the royal history that has been conveyed to the audiences (Vasinarom, 2012)

2. Belief found in the First Three Thai Enacted laws.

People in the past lacked scientific understanding, so they believed that natural phenomena were made from supernatural powers such as spirits, ghosts, or angels. Consequently, they held a ritual to sacrifice those spirits to provide abundance on their land, or power to them in return. Most of the rituals consisted of dancing such as 'Font Phi' (dancing to sacrifice spirits), the dance of the master of Khon's teacher in gratitude ceremony, and a medium accessibility ritual. As well as this, traditional dancing is always a part of rituals and acts as a communicative channel from the leader. For instance, Kathak Kathi is a performance held according to Brahmanism. Thai mask dance, Khon, is performed aligning with the belief in spirits, Brahmanism, and Buddhism. Gospel songs are performed in the Christian Sunday church (Vasinarom, 2019). Li-Kea or Yi-Kea has been developed from Islamic Allah Prayer (Virulrak, 1972). Those beliefs can be found in the First Three Thai Enacted Laws which consisted of prohibitions, permissions, and regulations. Awards and punishments were the results of discipline and disobedience, respectively.

King Barom Triloganart, one of Ayutthaya kings, had initiated those laws which were later adjusted in the Rattanakosin time between King Rama the 1st and the 3rd. However, those laws have been terminated in the reign of King Rama the 5th because of the administrative reform. King Rama the 5th had to issue many laws to keep up with the western ones (The History of Thai Laws, 1973). Besides, these laws have acted as a record of social situations, beliefs, populations, ethnic groups, rituals, royal ceremonies, and traditional dances at that time. They are the key foundations of beliefs and ethnic groups which are the cultural capital of the traditional dancing development of Thailand (The First Three Thai Enacted Laws, Beliefs, and Thai Society, 2003).

The beliefs in the laws have been generated into spirits, Brahmanism, and Buddhism leading to ritual dances in royal ceremonies, performances according to the beliefs, and Lakhon Nai in the later time (Vasinarom, 2021) as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. The Beliefs Appeared in The First Three Thai Enacted Laws, Dances, and Lakhon Nai.

Beliefs	The First Three Thai Enacted Laws	Dances	Lakorn Nai
Spirits	Pilgrimage Ceremony, feudal prosecutor, citizens, district army, diving, and fire penetration ceremony to prove truth, royal ceremonies in the royal laws: Floating Banana Decorated Objects in the river, and Army Parade Inspection	Characters and their emblems, Mon Dance, Striking a wooden club at a wooden ball game, royal plays, Mon Acrobatic Plays, Wire Trapeze show, Dragon Dance with a crystal ball	The content of the story is about adultery affairs.
Brahmanism	The names of the highest gods: Shiva, Narayana, Brahma, and Indra. Besides, the beliefs and	Khon characters appeared in the laws with their emblems	The story of the royal family depicted the

Beliefs	The First Three Thai Enacted Laws	Dances	Lakorn Nai
	rituals appeared in the principles of Indra and Dharmaśāstra, feudal prosecutors, citizens, district army, royal ceremonies in the royal laws: Enthronement Ceremony.	including the royal plays: Ramayana, and Aunnarut	courageous image of the leader as a mandate of heaven and dharma including soft opera of royal drama, costumes, props, and emblems. Traditional aerophone and percussion musical band (Piphart Band), character's songs (Pleang Naphart), Thai traditional band (Mahoree Band) played in rituals and for entertaining.
Buddhism	The names of the Lord of Buddha, and the Crown Prince. Besides, the beliefs appeared in the principles of Indra and Dharmaśāstra, feudal prosecutors, district army, citizens, royal ceremonies in royal laws: Ceremonies of Enthronement, and Floating Banana Decorated Objects in the river	Khon characters appeared with their emblems including the royal plays related to ethnic groups: Ramayana, and Manorah Chadok.	The story of the royal family depicted the courageous image of the leader as a mandate of heaven and dharma including soft opera of royal drama, costumes, props, and emblems. Traditional aerophone and percussion musical band (Piphart Band), character's songs (Pleang Naphart), Thai traditional band (Mahoree Band) played in rituals and for entertaining.

According to the table, the beliefs have been derived from ethnic groups around the SouthEastern Asian Region and the faraway, so Thai leaders had adjusted the beliefs upon which Thai identity has

been formed leading to the creation of Lakhon Nai. The beliefs have been passed down with the administrative system, rituals, social conventions, and dances.

3. Ethnic groups are found in the First Three Thai Enacted laws.

Each ethnic group shares similar concepts, conventions of belief and ritual, discipline, language, culture, and dancing styles leading to their uniqueness among the others. During the Ayutthaya era, numbers of ethnic groups relocated themselves from their homes: Mons, Laos, Cambodians, Yuans, Chams Japanese, Myanmars, Thwais, Chinese, Javas, and Malays while some came from faraway places: Indians, Persians, and Westerners (Dutch, British, and French). Their ethnic beliefs and number of group members caused an interchangeable culture inside Ayutthaya and the leaders had to adapt their preferences and policies according to the social context (Vasinarom, 2021). Ruangjirayos (2018) added that dancing styles and rituals according to the ethnic beliefs could initiate their identities among the others and had been recorded in the First Three Thai Enacted Laws. Additionally, Obbaom and Boonthip (2019) gave examples of ethnic identities in Lakhon Nai. Islamic Chams used daggers for their weapons like Javas and Malays. In an Indonesian play 'Panjit Tales', Bussaba, the leading female character, is a Buddhist which is not a belief but a religion. Many characters in this play take daggers as their weapons according to the play's condition. The combination of Buddhism Mahayana Doctrine, Islamic Chams, and the use of daggers can be found in Panjit Tales. Another example of different leading role characteristics, beliefs, rituals, and social norms among ethnic groups can be found in Ramayana characters such as Rama, Sita, Piphek, and Hanuman, owing to the individual preference of the playwright, the country leader.

The results reveal two interesting points: the inheritance of beliefs and Thai administration through Thai traditional dance, and the inheritance of ethnic influence that appeared in Lakhon Nai.

1. The inheritance of beliefs and Thai administration through Lakhon Nai

Lakhon Nai is a drama within the sphere of Thai traditional dances. It has become a communicative tool for leaders since the Ayutthaya era to educate people, announce public policy, and establish Thai identity into which the other cultures could be blended harmoniously. Lakhon Nai can be held as a short or a long play. The content has delivered the individual and group experience in the sovereign circle. Besides, the important theme was based upon the leader who was believed as a mandate of heaven bringing an abundance of land, peace, and order to his country by issuing a decree to eliminate the severity and famine. Lakhon Nai can be a role model for an appropriate social practice that has become a strict discipline in the royal convention that appeared in the First Three Thai Enacted laws and Royal Laws. Apart from this, some royal ceremonies can be seen in some scenes of Lakhon Nai.

It is found that Lakhon Nai has been a historical record of beliefs and Thai administration which are the origins of Thai culture until now.

Presumably, Lakhon Nai originated in the Ayutthaya era as can be seen in the Thai Literature Bunnawat Kham Chan. Initially, Lakhon Nai was called 'Lakhon Nai Borrirak Jakri' or a royal female troupe. Two stories, Aunnarut and Panjit Tales, were performed. However, Prince Damrong Rachanupharph has given another interesting fact that the origins of Lakhon Nai could result from the three combinations: male drama with Khone, male drama with traditional male dance, and traditional female dance and black magic as appeared in preludes and royal plays. The beliefs in Lakhon Nai reflected Thai administration through three components: spirits, Brahmanism (Narai and Indra), and Buddhism (Mahayana doctrine which was later altered into Theravada doctrine in the reign of King Rama the 4th).

King Taksin the Great, who commenced the Thonburi era, has further added his Ramayana play into Lakhon Nai for four acts which were performed by a royal female group. After that, King Rama the 1st of the Ratanakosin Reign has restored Lakhon Nai continuously like in Ayutthaya time. He also added his contribution to the play by setting the performance in regular time and special occasions. It can be stated that the relationship between Lakhon Nai and the leaders is indispensable as sometimes

the leaders can be the playwrights. Last but not least, some acts of Lakhon Nai has been listed in the special course and compulsory courses such as the acts of floating maiden and Rama in the jungle in Ramayana, the acts of Supaluck drawing a picture and Supaluck Aum Som in Aunnarut, the acts of Bussaba in the shrine, Bussaba worshipping, defrocking a nun, Yaran following a peacock in Panjit Tales, and the prelude of 'Mekhala and Ramasune' (the thunder giant).

2. The inheritance of ethnic influence appeared in Lakhon Nai.

Ramayana, Aunnarut, and Panjit Tales have been chosen for this research study because those plays have been continuously performed and enlisted in a compulsory course of the Fine Arts Department. The elements to be studied were listed as follows.

a. Plots:

The plots are derived from the beliefs of spirits, Buddhism, and Brahmanism that appear in the First Three Thai Enacted laws.

b. Characters :

The characters' names are obtained from the ethnic names in the First Three Thai Enacted laws. The characters are created according to the beliefs as appeared in the laws. The mental and physical features of the characters are designed based on the traditional practice by the author.

c. Patterns of the performance

Lakhon Nai can be shown in two types of play: a full show and a short one which is a partial show in the series of traditional plays. The performance can be a solo, a couple, or a group show such as a prelude, a blessing show, or a play.

d. Content of the play:

The content is always related to the author's experience and feelings towards the social situation at that time. The play always ends with happy and peaceful moments such as the celebration of ethnic groups who came to shelter themselves under the protection of the Thai King. The names of the play types have been revealed in the First Three Thai Enacted Laws corresponding to the ethnic groups.

e. Lyrics

Most lyrics are loan words and transliterate such as Ma-De-Wee and Inao in Panjit Tales. The characters use pronouns to name themselves and to receive the king's order such as 'Pra-Puttha-Chao-Kha' which means 'I' or 'me'.

f. Rhythm:

The rhythms of the songs are imitated from the rhythm of the ethnic songs such as Phra-Thong, Cha-Phee, Rai-Nai, Khak-Mon, Khmer-York, and Chord-Chine.

g. Musical Instruments

The instruments involve the ethnic instruments into Thai traditional bands to maintain the feeling of the ethnic songs.

h. Costumes

The costume design is associated with the traditional king's and the nobleman's attires and military outfits. For ethnic costumes, some ethnic outfits have been partially applied to show the identity of the group.

i. Gestures:

Ethnic gestures are derived from the routine movement of that ethnic group.

j. Stage:

There is something in common in stage design for the ethnic groups around Asia except the westerner groups owing to their different ideas, beliefs, and norms.

k. Props:

The use of the props depends on the acts and plays. Those props correspond with the characters and beliefs.

l. Actors

In the past, it was acceptable for males to perform in the play while the roles of females were very limited because of the beliefs and norms. The casting criteria are based upon good dancing skills, good-looking, and a good understanding of the character's motive to convey the appreciation of the play. The roles are generated into two types: reality and imagination.

m. Performance:

It is customary to start the performance by worshipping to god according to the instructor's beliefs. The tragic hero who died at the end of the play is unacceptable as this will draw bad luck and misfortune to the show and audiences.

n. Opportunity to see the plays:

Most Lakhon Nai plays are performed in the royal ceremonies, and welcoming ceremonies while some aim for education, entertainment, and widespread public policy from the king. As well as this, Lakhon Nai is used to honor the King.

o. Practice:

The longer the actors practice, the better show it will be.

The factors affecting the inheritance of beliefs and ethnic groups in Lakhon Nai are the leaders and their administrative policy. Moreover, ethnic beliefs, cultures, and dance have been brought into Thailand and adapted into Thai cultures leading to their identities. Lakhon Nai has been well supported by the royal families and the government to preserve and carry on the beliefs, faith, and national legacy.



Figure 1. Ramayana performance shown with other ethnic groups
Source: Information and Communication Technology Center, 2021

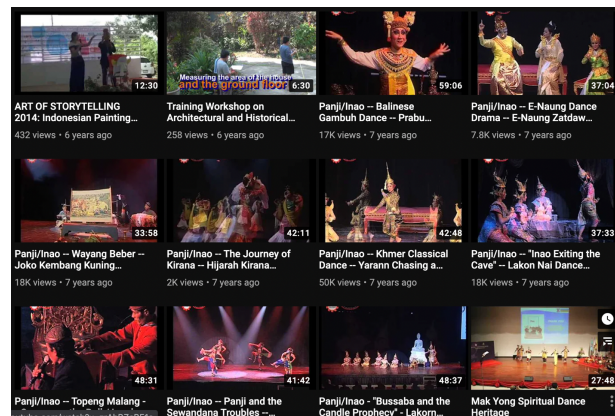


Figure 2. Panji or Inao performed in Southeast Asian countries
Source: SEAMEOSPAFA, 2021



Figure 3. Ramayana: Rama, the reincarnation of Narai, in an act of ‘Narai Sip Pang’ (the ten lives of Narai) composed by King Rama the 6th. One act was about the reincarnation of Narai into the Lord of Buddha.

Source: Worawit NU, 2021



Figure 4. Prelude ‘Mekhala and Ramasune’ (the thunder giant) according to the thunder and lightning legend which is believed that this will bring rain and agricultural abundance.

Source: Buachufuk (Saksun Sangjindawongmuang, 2021



Figure 5. Prelude ‘A Dance of Silvery and Golden bunches’ or ‘Chui-Chai dance with Silvery and Golden bunches’ to explain the history of prelude which is a special identity of Lakhon Nai.

Source: Kedsuriyong, 2021



Figure 6. Aunnaruth from Maha-Bharat Play: Suppaluck Aum Som portraying the love destiny story by Suppaluck who destined the successful love.

Source: Whutthichai Khatawee, 2021



Figure 7. Panjit Tales from the Java heroic story: The Worshipping of Bussaba Act showing the author's religious belief which was Buddhism.

Source: Thai Music and Performing Arts by Kru Nes, 2021



Figure 8. Panjit Tales from the Java heroic story: Defrocking a Nun Act showing the performances for the Royal Cremation.

Source: Siammelody, 2021



Figure 9. Panjit Tales from the Java heroic story: The act of Yaran Following the Peacock which was magically transformed by Indra to help him from getting lost.
Source: plu3miiz, 2021



Figure 10. Ramayana: A Floating Maiden Act
Saisawan Khayanying, 2021



Figure 11. Ramayana: The Battle of Bromas
Source: Thairat, 2021



Figure 12. Ramayana: Narai Defeating Nondhuk Act
Source: Pinterest, 2021



Figure 13. Panjit Tales: The Sacrifice Act
Source: Kiattisak. Wongliang, 2021



Figure 14. Aunnaruth: Som Kinnaree Act
Source: Dada, 2021

Conclusions and Discussion

The Inheritance of beliefs and ethnic groups: a case study of Lakhon Nai as appeared in the First Three Thai Enacted laws have been carried on in the performance and listed in the educational courses of the Department of Fine Arts for ages. In ancient times, the leader used Lakhon Nai to communicate his message, record the story, and show his image and social situation. The period of performance can be short or long. The content is based on either reality of the royal family or imagination. The leading role always performs as a hero who is believed as a mandate of heaven and dharma. He always brings his country into order and peace. The traditional beliefs of spirits, Brahmanism, and Buddhism have been aligned with the ethnic groups resulting in the blending of beliefs, rituals, and dancing styles. Through belief and cultural blending, this became the norm of the royal house and Thai society. Despite alteration of leaders, social situation, and public policy, the stronghold on the monarch institute has been ongoing leading to the novel unique of Thai which still maintains the core component of cultural and performance inheritance.

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