

# Cultural Influences Affecting Dance Values:

## *A Case Study of Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic*

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to study cultural invasion from the countries inside and outside of the Asian Economic Community - AEC, that affects values on traditional dance among the Thai and Lao societies; the cultures of these two countries are related and similar. The approach of foreign cultures; therefore, impacts the two cultures in the same direction. The research found that natural characteristics of the new generations adapt to the global economic and social changes based on five variables; media and technology, music and entertainment businesses, education, fashion, and food. These affect values of the Thai people evidently, especially media and technology that is the core where other variables are passed through. This results in unconscious information absorption of the cultures; this leads to a new culture adoption which results in changes of cultures and ways of life. This impacts values in traditional dance, leading to the lack of human resources that could help continue the work of traditional dance. Strengthening youth that will become Thailand's future driving force needs to start from cultivating the right values. Guidance from family and teachers are encouraged to give comprehension, awareness, admiration and conservation of the national cultures, to further select, adapt, and comprehend cultural invasion effectively.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Invasion, Traditional Dance, Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic*

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## Introduction

The world is entering the era of rapid and intense change; this includes Thailand and Laos joining the AEC which initiates changes in various fields and cultural diversity. This influences change in ways of life of people in society based on cultures coming through various forms: through media, technology, fashion, food, etc., resulting in children, youth, and people in society excessive consumption of international cultures that they forget their own cultures. The Thai and Lao cultures are related and similar; therefore, the penetration of international cultures thus affects the two cultures at the same direction. This is considered cultural invasion that needs to be studied to find solutions for people in the society to be more open in embracing new international cultures while not forgetting their own.

The academic achievement of the Thai and Lao students are below standards each year; most students pay more attention to games and media for entertainment purposes than on education. Furthermore, they still lack analytical thinking and pride in national cultures and wisdom. These impacts are caused by various factors that enter along with information technology, which is an intellectual treasure that everyone can access. This changes people's present ways of life altogether. Therefore, organizations and sectors need to develop and adapt themselves to keep up with the change at all times. This technological advancement reduces the values of traditional dance, as international cultures are flooding in through media and technology as main variable, bringing along other variables that change the cultures of people in the countries.

With traditional dance being neglected from people in society, it is necessary to advocate understanding of cultures among people in the countries, to prepare for new incoming cultures while keeping the original cultures to remain visible, especially the ability to keep up with technology. Moreover, benefits of information technology are employed to integrate knowledge and cultures, to create awareness on values and pride in their own cultures. This is to emphasise citizens not to overlook their own cultures as they are studying and exchanging other cultures with other nations.

## Terminology

Cultural invasion refers to the cultures inside or outside the AEC that influence change in cultural values of Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

## Objectives

To study cultural invasion from inside and outside the AEC that affects values on traditional dance of people in the Thai and Lao cultures.

## Scope of Research

This research is a qualitative one; its scope is as follows:

### Value Variables

This focuses on the main variables that are caused by cultural invasion of countries inside and outside the AEC that affect values of traditional dance of people in Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic; this includes:

- Values on media and technology
- Values on music and entertainment
- Values on education
- Values on fashion
- Values on food

#### Population Group

- The national artists, experts, and scholars in traditional dance and the performing arts
- Educators at higher education level who teach dancing and performing arts in Thailand and Laos.
- Undergraduate students

#### Related Research Documents

Gathering of data and researches that are related the traditional dance teachers' qualifications in handling cultural invasion from the countries inside and outside the AEC: A case study of Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The data concerns the following elements:

- Causes of cultural changes
- Cultural variables that influences change in Thai values and their ways of life
- Cultural variables that influences change in Lao values and their ways of life

#### Methodology

##### Data Collection and Interviews

a. National artists, experts, and scholars on dance and performing arts as follows:

1. Professor Emeritus Surapol Virunrak, Ph.D. Fellow, Royal Academy of Thailand.
2. Suvannee Chalanukroh, national artist, performing arts (Thai traditional dance), of 1990.
3. Dr. Rajana Puangprayong, national artist, performing arts (Thai traditional dance), of 2011.
4. Associate Professor Supachai Chansuwan, national artist, performing arts (Thai traditional dance), of 2005.
5. Dr. Patravadi Mejudhon, national artist, performing arts (stage plays and film arts), of 2014.
6. Pradit Prasartthong, Silpathorn Award winner, performing arts.
7. Manop Meejamrat, Silpathorn Award winner, performing arts.
8. Pairoj Thongkumsuk, Ph.D., Music and Drama Academician, Librarian, Professional Level.
9. Wantanee Muangboon, Ph.D., Music and Drama Academician, Advisory Level (specialist in Khon- Drama and music), the Office of Performing Arts, the Fine Arts Department
10. Assistant Professor Varinporn Tabket, Lecturer at the Faculty of Art Education, Bunditpatanasilpa Institute, Ministry of Culture, and others.

b. Professors at the higher education level who teach dancing and performing arts in Thailand and Laos.

c. Undergraduate students included:

1. Students from the Dance Department, the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University.
2. Students from the Faculty of Arts Education, Buditpatanasilpa Institute.
3. Students from the Dance Department, the Faculty of Fine Arts, Srinakharinwirot University
4. Students from the Fine and Applied Arts Dance Major, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Bansomdejchaopraya Rajabhat University

d. Other sources

- Researching of data from books, researches, and related online database from various sources.
- Gathering of data from documents and interviews for further analysis and result summary.

### Research Results

The research found that the new generations, Generation Y and Z, are the people who were born into the computer and technology era. They are addicted to online platforms, therefore, the amount of news consumed is tremendous, whether of global updates or any future forecast. This shapes their personalities into being fast decision makers who dislike waiting. Most communication methods carried out by these people are done through texting on mobile phones, or on computer instead of conversing face-to-face. Furthermore, these generations are just entering into the career world. They are expressive and self-confident; they also hate disciplines and conditions. In addition, they are capable of work that is related to communication and possess multi-tasking skills. Therefore, these groups of people do not like being employees, but instead, choose to own small businesses. They value freedom and have their own unique paths. Understanding characteristics of the new generations of the countries enable us to see main variables that are caused by cultural invasion from inside and outside of the AEC that affects values on traditional dance of people in Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic; this includes media and technology, music and entertainment, education, fashion, and food. These variables are illustrated below.

### Media and Technology Values

Technology and media are extremely vital and necessary to human's daily life. These gadgets include mobile phones, especially smartphones, or tablets, already considered the fifth basic necessity, need to provide several functions and applications, from making calls, instant messages, camera, music, games, to enabling video players, etc. This responds to the younger generations' life cycle of the digital era, not as a virtual but a real world (Common, 2013). Apart from being a medium in presenting various information, current technology facilitates our daily life, making it more convenient, creating pleasure and entertainment through rapid borderless communication. This, however, leads to information consumption without filtering and analysing stages (Intrapraser, 2013), thus creating a gap where international cultures flow through, via the consumption of international food culture, fashion, and many others through films and adverts (Suksa, 2011). This

draws attention of people in society to those international cultures with perceived novelty and appeal, eventually encouraging new fashions and imitation that lead to oblivion to one's own national culture and cultural assimilation (Visesrith, 2009).

Cultural impacts caused by technology and media variable influences youth in terms of judgment of media consumption (Intraprasert, 2013). Due to its perceived novelty as society's new basic necessity, advertisers often neglect the age limits of media consumers and aims only to seek profits. Youth, who received information from various media channels, being more open to new media for entertainment purposes, usually lack a good judgment, resulting in cultural change and conflict. The current contents presented in an instant form, focusing on promptness, are, however, low in quality. For example, international fashions and costumes are perceived as luxurious and fashionable, while polite and modest costumes of Thailand and Laos are seen as old-fashioned and unpleasant. This notion also applies to the Thai traditional dance that are perceived mostly by the Thai people as outdated and backward. When the new generations are paying more continuous attention to the new incoming international cultures, the perceived values of the national traditional dance decrease. The Thai and Lao societies lack human resources to continue traditional dance work; this is because it does not receive enough attention – support, resulting in a reduced frequency of shows and the hiring of traditional dancers. The lack of interested audience leads to a decrease in presenters, conservators, and inheritors of the traditional dance. Despite the promotion through various media, it is not well-received since the new generations are not aware of their own cultures' values.

#### **Values – Music and Entertainment Businesses**

As media plays more prominent role in society, international cultures infiltrate into the Thai and Lao societies at a rapid pace. Since people in the current society are stressed by work, using media for entertaining and recreational purposes reduce a great deal of tension. The media well-accepted by society are music, films, and series. It is evident that international cultures are permeating society through these media that enable both visuals and sound, allowing unconscious absorption of information which creates impression; thus, they are adopted in real life (Intraprasert, 2013). The result is change in cultures and ways of life.

Apart from foreign films, domestically-produced films still lack the support that shows a positive side of national culture, and often present traditional dance in a negative angle. The contents, setting, and costumes of the national traditional dance performers are displayed as the Thai dancing costumed ghosts, etc. This leads to new generations' perception, already distant from their cultures, of the national traditional dance to be mysterious and frightful, untouchable, and only concerned superstition and spirits. Traditional dance, which in fact are the nation's important treasure, are portrayed by society in a horrific image. This creates fear and hesitation among younger generations to study or perceive traditional dance with first-hand experience (Rittibul, 2015). When traditional dance are presented negatively, it affects perspectives towards traditional dance among the

Thai people, further reducing its popularity as a study choice and affecting the number of human resources who can help continue traditional dance.

In terms of music that affects values on traditional dance, it is due to changing society based on time and periods. In the past, there were the Thai folk dance or music to relieve people from exhaustion after work and establish good relationships among people in society. However, as time passes, values of the folk dance and sing also change. People in society often neglect and ignore the support and conservation of one's own arts and cultures. Instead, interest and support in foreign entertainment media increase significantly. Even though concerts can also relieve people from stress, create pleasure, and allow people to participate in activities, they still lack the involvement of personal relationships which exist in the original Thai folk dance (Chalanukroh, 2016). Furthermore, the image of international music is perceived as up-to-date and trendy, not outdated compared to the Thai and Lao music that are considered national music.

### Values – Education

High consumption of media and technology implants fear of the future. Their thoughts usually are occupied with jobs to prevent future unemployment, career stability, and tendency to choose better-paying jobs than jobs they personally prefer. In reality, every occupation carries its own importance and is required in society; however, values in choosing educational path is seen as a way to improve their social status. Students who graduate from famous and prestigious institutions gain future good career paths; therefore, many guardians suggest that their children pursue main subjects in general education in universities, rather than vocational education. The reasons are that degrees are vital for a career and also considered a pass to advance in one's career, providing more options in life (Silabut et al., 2007).

In addition, wrong beliefs concerning general and vocational education is that students who pursue general education are better at studying than students who pursue vocational education. They are given better opportunity in choosing a more variety of work, receiving better pay and change in making more progress, which brings prestige and respect in society. This negatively influences the image of vocational education to be perceived as lower-grade study; an education for bad students which prevents many students from pursuing this path for fear of being looked down upon (Puangprayong, 2016).

Thailand and Laos' participation in the AEC impacts values on choosing education, in traditional dance as vocational education. According to the Ninth ASEAN Summit, Bali, Indonesia, the Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) was agreed on regarding the qualifications of the major occupations, movements of services, products, labour, and free flow of investment. It specifies that qualified workers in their own occupations and skilled workers can move to work in other ASEAN countries freely and legally. The ASEAN members agreed on the first seven occupations which include engineers, nurses, architects, explorers, accountants, dentists, and doctors. This influences student choices in pursuing general and



vocational education of these seven occupations. Being enhanced by values on education perceived by the Thai and Lao people concerning general and vocational education aforementioned, most students thus choose to study in the subjects they think can provide them with real future careers, rather than selecting traditional dance education that offer limited choices in society.

Furthermore, technological advancement leads to negligence of certain study methods of traditional dance. For example, the choreography of the Thai dance requires step-by-step personal instruction from teachers (one-on-one). It is not merely achieved by one specific dance move, but teachers usually include practical skills and theories, and also assist in correcting each dancer's flaws individually. However, many students these days are looking for superficial knowledge by studying the choreography from YouTube; this prevents them from knowing every single detail of each dance routine. It results eventually in the lack of comprehension and higher mistakes, consequently deviating and deteriorating the inheritance of national culture.

#### **Values – Fashion**

Fashion values which affect the Thai traditional dance appear in the form of imitation. Most young people pay more attention to foreign cultures compare to their own. This is introduced through media which allows people to access different fashion trends (Prasartthong, 2016). For example, musicians and their record labels have a new way to present their music; instead of only through sound, consumers can also watch motion along with listening to music where everything is put into a storyline called an MV (music video), creating a better sensation in perceiving music. This is well-responded by consumers; therefore, MV is presented in various ways to interest the audience and create a good response to their labels. Each record label has different techniques in drawing attention from the audience; certain songs are presented through MVs with improper choreography and revealing costumes. This, however, draws a great deal of attention from consumers in Thailand and Laos. When more foreign cultures flow through without any control, it automatically encourages imitation. Younger generations are interested in music and usually gather together to perform imitation of performances of the real artists, called cover dance (Suksa, 2011). There are practices of dancing, singing, and dressing like the Western and Asian artists. Revealing costumes as shown on the MV increases risk of sexual assault on female teenagers. Nowadays, cover dance among young people are extremely popular that several contests are held, encouraging students to imitate dance routines by foreign artists even more. These dance moves are perceived as easy and only require a short period of time for practices, unlike the Thai traditional dance which requires patience and longer practices to be able to move elegantly (Chansuwan, 2016). Furthermore, studying the Thai traditional dance requires a high level of discipline and prevents them from following fashion trends, for example, hair dyes, nail paint or extensions, tattoos, multiple piercings on nose and ears, etc. This is to prevent them from a negative image that is not proper for Thai traditional dance career, or from an issue that obstructs their performances, etc.

The current fashion influences costumes used in the Thai traditional dance performances, especially the creative ones. There is an adaptation to make the costumes more up-to-date to better reach the audience and customers. This is evident from the adapted costumes that are different from the original ones, for example, wearing a shorter piece of fabric, a crop top, low-rise Panung, or tight-fitting costumes, to enhance body lines of the performers. This includes adding more body accessories and head pieces to create novelty and to differentiate itself from the original one, etc. It emphasises the attractiveness rather than symbolic beauty. The new forms of costume creation are the result of international costume influences. Therefore, conservation of the original costume should always be taken into consideration to prevent excessive change caused by over consumption of foreign cultures.

### Values – Food

Food consumption behaviours change based on the economic, social, and political conditions. Consumption based on new values usually affects people's health. Several causes that change food consumption behaviours are daily social conditions that people are facing, for example, bad traffic, heavy workload, or hasty lifestyle, etc. Therefore, fast food receives more popularity than homemade food (Varathornpaiboon, 2014). Nevertheless, most fast food dishes lack quality and do not provide enough nutrition for the body's needs, resulting in nutrition insufficiency for daily calorie intake.

Cultural invasion that are brought in through media, such as MV, films, artists, celebrities, are the variables that initiate food values; this affects people in society caused by its modern presentation. Food demonstrated on films are beautifully adjusted and display vibrant colours, tempting the audience to try it. In the present, people lack prudence in selecting food since they focus more on the hasty lifestyle, food fashion trends thus invite people to try more international cuisines, for instance, American, Italian, Japanese, Vietnamese, or Korean foods, etc. Food consumption behaviours show that consumers are choosing to enter more international restaurants; however, the nutritional values of those foods do not fit the suggested calorie intake for the Thai and Lao people. This further leads to excess fat storage and following health issues (Varathornpaiboon, 2014). In addition, it can also cause economic impacts since international restaurant are priced much higher than the Thai and Lao foods.

Nevertheless, there might not be extreme impacts on the traditional dance of Thailand since there are not that many Thai restaurants that offer the Thai dance performances to entertain their customers during their meal. The true impacts, however, lie in the lack of human resources in this field due to the low pay; this is also caused by the entrepreneurs' cost reduction strategy that trims down this part of expenses.

### Conclusion and Discussion

The Thai and Lao societies are both facing the cultural invasion issues caused by foreign cultures inside and outside of the AEC. The main issue is caused by the



new generations' natural characteristics that are adaptive to the constant global change, economically and socially. The five variables which include media and technology, music and entertainment businesses, education, fashion, and food, are the main impacts on change of values on the traditional dances; the main variable is media and technology which are the carrier of all other variables. Building strength for younger generations soon to become the nation's future driving force should start from cultivating right values. Education from family and teachers will provide comprehension and awareness, to cherish and conserve national cultures, along with choosing to accept certain elements to adapt and truly understand cultural invasion effectively.

### Suggestions

Developing human resources in the field of traditional dances in Thailand and the Laos People's Democratic Republic are highly necessary since these people play an extremely vital role in conserving and continuing the Thai heritage and traditions in dance. Furthermore, traditional knowledge should also be applied to create the traditional dance performances based on the right disciplines and procedures, etc. Therefore, planning and studying of guidelines beforehand to confront incoming cultural invasion from the inside and outside of the AEC should be encouraged, along with solving the systematic problem solving of raising an awareness among young people to not to fall unknowingly a victim of cultural invasion and influences.

Furthermore, additional study on the impacts caused by cultural invasion from the countries inside and outside of the AEC, on education and curriculum making at higher education level, should be advocated, to create shields and solutions with prompt responses.

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