

## “Matuya Metta” Creation of Javanese Dance Drama from the Story of Phra Lor

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### **Abstract**

*Matuya Metta* is a Javanese dance-drama performance in the Yogyakarta dance style in the form of group choreography. This drama features the story of Phra Lor, famous in Thai literature. *Matuya* comes from the word “matu”, meaning mother, and “metta” meaning love. So, “*Matuya Metta*” means a mother's love. The reason for choosing the Phra Lor story is that there are similarities between the Thai a *siang nam* ritual and the Javanese tradition called *tapa kungkum*. *Matuya Metta* dance drama is expressed dramatically and symbolically. It is danced by three dancers and the piece contains in five segments. Javanese dance in the Yogyakarta style is the basis for the movements, namely the characters of *alusan* and *putri luruh*. The music is adapted to the atmosphere in the story and the character's movements according to contemporary Javanese tradition. The performance combines recordings of gamelan instruments with digital music. The makeup and costume designs are inspired by Javanese dance and Thai ornaments. This dance-drama also uses minimal staging properties and settings to beautify the performance and help the audience understand the story.

**Keywords:** Phra Lor, Javanese, dance drama, choreography

### **“Matuya Metta” Penciptaan Drama Tari Jawa dari Kisah Phra Lor**

#### **Abstrak**

*Matuya Metta* adalah pertunjukan drama tari Jawa gaya Yogyakarta dalam bentuk koreografi kelompok. Drama ini menampilkan kisah Phra Lor yang terkenal dalam sastra Thailand. *Matuya* berasal dari kata “matu” yang berarti ibu, dan “metta” yang berarti cinta. Jadi, “*Matuya Metta*” berarti cinta seorang ibu. Alasan dipilihnya cerita Phra Lor adalah karena ada kesamaan antara ritual *siang nam* orang Thailand dengan tradisi Jawa yang disebut *tapa kungkum*. Drama tari *Matuya Metta* diekspresikan secara dramatis dan simbolis. Tarian ini ditarikan oleh tiga orang penari dan terdiri dari lima segmen. Tari Jawa gaya Yogyakarta menjadi dasar gerakannya yaitu tokoh *alusan* dan *putri luruh*. Musiknya disesuaikan dengan suasana dalam cerita dan gerak-gerik tokoh sesuai tradisi Jawa kontemporer. Pertunjukan tersebut menggabungkan rekaman instrumen gamelan dengan musik digital. Desain tata rias dan kostumnya terinspirasi dari tarian Jawa dan ornamen Thailand. Drama tari ini juga menggunakan properti dan setting pementasan yang minim untuk mempercantik pertunjukan dan membantu penonton memahami ceritanya.

**Kata Kunci:** Phra Lor, Jawa, drama tari, koreografi



to Meuang Song to meet Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng. Phra Lor felt doubtful and hesitant on the way to Meuang Song while on the Kalong River. Then he does a *siang nam* ritual by meditating and offering prayers in the Kalong River to know whether to continue his journey. In the end, Phra Lor decided to continue his journey to Meuang Song, and the story ended in tragedy. Phra Lor, Phra Pheuan, Phra Phaeng, and four of his servants died (Bickner, 2020; Narathip Praphan Phong, 1972; Thummachuk Prompuay, Lecturer of Thai Drama Department Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts Ramkhamhaeng University, personal interview, 2021).

There are several exciting things in Lilit Phra Lor's story; when Phra Lor feels doubts during the trip to Meuang Song, Phra Lor's conscience still remembers and misses his mother during his journey. The researcher interprets that Phra Lor shows genuine love for his mother. Then Phra Lor does the *siang nam* ritual, meditating on the Kalong River. The results of the meditation show what will happen to Phra Lor in the future, that Phra Lor will meet his death if he continues his journey. However, the magic of Puu Jao Saming Phrai was so strong that it made Phra Lor unable to return to Meuang Maen Suang and had to continue his journey to Meuang Song to meet Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng. The author interprets the scene of Phra Lor performing the *siang nam* ritual as similar to a ritual in Java called *tapa kungkum*, a meditation ritual is done by soaking in the river and indulging the mantra or wish (Nada, 2019; Nuraini et al., 2011; Prawito, 2013).

The researcher considers and selects several scenes in the story of Lilit Phra Lor from Thailand as inspiration for creating a performing arts piece. Works created based on Javanese tradition and culture are called "*dramatari*" (Soedarsono et al., 2011). Here, they are developed appropriately to create a performance with a cultural connection between Thai literacy and Javanese-style performing arts (Soedarsono et al., 2011).

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

To study the creation of a Javanese dance drama from a Thai literature story titled *Phra Lor*.

## **RESEARCH SCOPE**

1. To create a Yogyakarta-style Javanese dance drama titled "Matuya Metta", mixing Javanese dance drama style with Thai literature from Phra Lor story, on *siang nam* episode.
2. Period of conducting research will be from December 1st, 2021, to December 31st, 2022.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher has conducted a data research study and created the work of Javanese dance drama with the title *Matuya Metta* to examine the various possibilities that occur. The conclusion of the results of research on the creation of works of art is detailed in the method as follows:

1. Formulate two main concepts: a) Bringing Thai stories to be displayed in Javanese-style dance performances and b) Combining several elements of Yogyakarta-style classical dance performances with *Langendriya* dance drama arts.
2. Study various data related to *Matuya Metta*, including written sources, and audio-visual media, as a basis for creating performing arts.
3. Study the creation of Javanese performing arts inspired by stories from outside Java.
4. Create and develop the show called *Matuya Metta*.
5. Conduct the Javanese dance drama performance experiment “*Matuya Metta*” in Building Three of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Perform and collect data from the show.
6. Gather opinions related to the show.
7. Analyze and process results.
8. Summarize research results.

## RESEARCH BENEFITS

1. The creation of dance works by combining Thai literature with Javanese culture.
2. Javanese dance drama style with a story from the Thai literature of Phra Lor.
3. The performance of a Javanese dance drama with the title *Matuya Metta*.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

*Matuya Metta* dance drama brings stories from Thai literature to create a performance based on Javanese arts and traditions with several developments. Based on the research process, the researcher analyzed the data by dividing essential elements with the following details:

### 1. Story Content

#### 1.1. Story Selection

Thailand and Java have had lifelong cultural friendships for over 250 years. Thai people have enjoyed Panji storytelling since the late 1700s and have used Panji in written Thai poetic literature and for court theatre for over two centuries (Amatyakul, 2019). This connection inspired the researcher to create a cross-cultural performance: a Javanese dance-drama performance inspired by a Thai story. The researcher chose Phra Lor's story as a performance work because the *siang nam* scene on the Kalong River shows similarities to the Javanese

tradition *tapa kungkum*. *Tapa kungkum* is a meditation ritual done by soaking in the river and praying for desires to be achieved (Martono & Puspita, personal interview, 2020). *Tapa kungkum* is one of the rituals that some people in Java still perform. In practical experience, the researcher also faced two hard and meaningful choices similar to how Phra Lor faced two choices: going to Meuang Song to meet Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng or staying in the kingdom with his mother and wife. The second reason is that there is little resemblance between Phra Lor's and the researcher's stories. These two reasons make the researcher more confident in choosing Phra Lor's story as the object of research in the form of Javanese drama dance performances.

### **1.2. Approach to Choosing Foreign Stories for Performance**

The approach taken by the researcher to choose Phra Lor's story as a performance work is to select essential parts of the story and arrange them into scenes, translated into various factors in the show. The details are as follows: 1) Divide the story into several scenes, 2) Explain the performance method in detail, 3) Complete the composition with music, and 4) Incorporate instrumental music that fits the atmosphere of the scenes (JuKlin & Boonpeng, 2020; Lewis, 2013). The researcher found this approach suitable and efficient for making shows within a limited time frame.

### **1.3. Story Development**

Story development includes taking the whole story and undergoing a process of selecting essential parts and a narrative approach to compose, improve, and develop as the researcher needs in creating performance work. The story taken by the researcher starts with Phra Lor saying goodbye to his mother while still in his kingdom, Meuang Maen Suang. Then Phra Lor travels from his kingdom to Meuang Song in search of Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng. During the trip, Phra Lor misses his mother and hesitates over his decision to go to Meuang Song. When Phra Lor arrives at the Kalong River, he takes a bath and purifies himself. Then Phra Lor does the *siang nam* (meditation) to seek answers to his doubts. Phra Lor receives the answer that he will be met with a colossal disaster. Phra Lor proceeds and finally meets Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng. They stayed in Meuang Song's royal chambers for several months. There was an attack of hundreds of arrows from the Phra Jao Yaa troops, who had a grudge against the Maen Suang kingdom. Phra Lor, Phra Pheuan, and Phra Phaeng did not survive.

### **1.4. Concept and Title**

Many parts of Thai literature on Phra Lor have become a reference and inspiration for the author to create works in the dramatic arts:

- 1) When Phra Lor says goodbye to his mother.
- 2) When Phra Lor meditates at the Kalong River.
- 3) When Phra Lor, Phra Pheuan, Phra Phaeng, and the four servants die.

On all these occasions, Phra Lor always remembered his mother, proving that Phra Lor's love for his mother was very true-to-life. The intensity conveyed in this dance drama work is the true love between mother and child and became an idea to work on for the production of the "Matuya Metta" dance-drama performance, the name taken from the Pali language. Therefore, the title expects to inform viewers that the love between mother and child is important and irreplaceable.

### 1.5. Performance Segments

In this section, the researcher chooses a more contemporary version story to develop as a scene in the show by paying attention to the essential points. This is the processing of data into a work structure so that the essence of this dance-drama can be conveyed to the audience. The researcher presented the story, divided into several scenes based on the following storyline:

#### 1.5.1. Segment 1, Introduction: Phra Lor *Siang Nam*

This scene starts with Phra Lor entering the stage and hesitating about his journey to Meuang Song. Then Phra Lor takes a bath in the Kalong River to purify himself before doing the *siang nam* ritual. In his heart, Phra Lor always sees pictures of his mother. However, in his mind, there were only two princesses, Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng.



**Picture 1.** Phra Lor takes a bath in the Kalong River  
Source: Chukiate Lertpenmayta, 2022

#### 1.5.2. Segment 2: Phra Lor *Laa Mae*

This scene contains the turmoil between Phra Lor and his mother when Phra Lor wants to leave the kingdom. His mother tells the story of Phra Lor from the birth of Phra Lor to raising him to become the successor to the throne, as he is today. Mother chose to die if Phra Lor persisted in leaving the kingdom. Phra Lor tried to

calm and persuade his mother. Finally, the mother expressed her love for Phra Lor and advised Phra Lor before he left. Phra Lor stroked his mother's feet with his hair, then left the palace. Mother, who lamented the situation, begged the gods for Phra Lor's safety.



**Picture 2.** After Phra Lor stroked his mother's feet with his hair  
Source: Chukiate Lertpenmayta, 2022

### 1.5.3.Segment 3: Phra Lor's Restlessness

In this scene, Phra Lor sees himself meditating. An internal debate is recognized. In his heart, Phra Lor remembers and tries to awaken from Puu Jao Saming Phrai's mantra. However, Phra Lor could not control himself. His heart rang with his mother, but his thoughts always went to Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng. The atmosphere grows tense until an internal war occurs.



**Picture 3:** Heart symbolization of Phra Lor remembers  
and tries to awaken from Puu Jao Saming Phrai's mantra  
Source: Chukiate Lertpenmayta, 2022

#### 1.5.4. Segment 4: The Answer of *Siang Nam*



**Picture 4.** Visual shadow of Phra Lor with Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng  
Source: Chukiate Lertpenmayta, 2022

Phra Lor chants a mantra: “If this trip will cost me my life, make the waters of this river turn around. However, if not, flow as usual.” Then he sees the vision of Phra Lor with Phra Pheuan and Phra Phaeng, depicted in the form of shadow puppets, dying from hundreds of arrows.

#### 1.5.5. Segment 5, Ending: Shadow of Mother

Phra Nang Bun Leua (Phra Lor's mother) appeared in the shadows of the heart approaching her son. Phra Lor trembled with fear and sorrow at what he saw during his meditation. Phra Lor apologizes to his mother while crying. Finally, Phra Lor falls asleep in his mother's arms.



**Picture 5.** Phra Nang Bun Leua (Phra Lor's mother) approaches her son  
Source: Chukiate Lertpenmayta, 2022



## 1.6. Performance Design

*Matuya Metta* is a unique intercultural dance-drama performance, collaborating with Javanese culture and a Thai story. The researcher selects the components to represent the dance piece, considering which parts should have Javanese or Thai characteristics. The researcher created a brief draft as a guideline for creating the preliminary work. The researcher drew a structure for the *Matuya Metta* dance performance, including the formations, scenes, equipment, character gestures, and various elements, as a model for the development of the actual show design (Hadi, 2014, 2018).

## 1.7. Characters and Dancers Selection

This dance drama was created in a group dance form with three main characters:

- 1) The real Phra Lor by Yarnawut Traisuwan.
- 2) Heart symbolization of Phra Lor by Okky Bima Reza Afrita.
- 3) Phra Nang Bun Leua (Phra Lor's mother) by Chanikarn Namwichai.

The researcher selects the dancers suitable for each role in appearance, acting method, dancing style, and personal character. The young performers united in rehearsal and performance were selected from a skilled group of dancers. They are also highly talented in the dramatic arts.

## 1.8. Movement

To create this dance-drama performance, Javanese dance movements in the Yogyakarta style were used as the basis for the movements. Based on the characters in this dance-drama, the researcher divided the dance style of the characters into male and female, with the following details:

1) *Alusan*. This form of Yogyakarta dance movement for male characters has gentle movement quality but depicts a masculine character (Soedarsono et al., 2011; Soerjodiningrat, 1934). This form of movement is used for the two characters of Phra Lor: the real Phra Lor and heart symbolization of Phra Lor. *Alusan* is used because Phra Lor is a handsome and soft-hearted king but also has a brave and masculine nature.

2) *Putri luruh*. This form of Yogyakarta dance movement for female characters and uses soft, gentle, and graceful movements (Karaton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, 2018; Soedarsono et al., 2011; Soemaryatmi, 2022; Soerjodiningrat, 1934). This form of movement is used for Phra Nang Bun Leua's character because Phra Nang Bun Leua is a mother who is soft-hearted and has a loving and patient nature.

The above movement forms were incorporated and developed according to *Matuya Metta's* dance-drama concept and the dancers' skills and abilities.

### **1.9. Music and Dialogue**

The researcher used components from Yogyakarta-style dance drama and opera dance performances (*langendriyan*) and adapted by making a new script using the Javanese language. The music and songs are adapted to the atmosphere in the story (Lewis, 2013), in addition to the characters' movements according to contemporary Javanese tradition for the suitability and perfection of the performance. The characters' names are also adjusted to feel natural when singing in Javanese. Fani Rickyansyah is the music composer for this dance-drama and used the method of recording gamelan instruments in combination with digital music. Gamelan is a group of traditional Javanese instruments. Phra Lor literature indicates that Phra Lor used conversational dialogue when saying goodbye to his mother. This inspired the researcher to use Javanese vocals, which was developed according to the concepts within the *Matuya Metta* dance drama (Sumarsam, 1995).

### **1.10. Makeup and Costume**

The makeup used in the *Matuya Metta* dance-drama piece is Yogyakarta-style dance makeup that is adapted to each character. Meanwhile, the costumes used were based on Yogyakarta-style dance, which was later developed and adapted to the concept of dance-drama work and combined with several Thai-style costume ornaments as cultural acculturation identity. The colors chosen to express the *Matuya Metta* are dominated by white, red, yellow, and black (see pictures 1-5 for more details).

### **1.11. Property and Staging**

The researcher uses several properties and staging settings to beautify the performance and help the audience understand the story. The props used are arrows and a *keris* (traditional Javanese dagger). In segment 4 (The Answer of Siang Nam), arrows are used to visualize the scene when Phra Lor, Phra Pheuan, and Phra Phaeng (in the form of shadow puppets) die from being hit by hundreds of arrows. The two Phra Lor characters use the *keris* that is part of the dancer's costume to fight as a symbol of Phra Lor's internal war when meditating on the Kalong River in segment 3 (Phra Lor's Restlessness).

The stage setting is a box and a white cloth. The box was used as a symbol of the existence of the Kalong River, where Phra Lor meditated. The broad white cloth is used as a backdrop. This white backdrop is also used as a medium to cast shadows during segment 4 (The Answer of *Siang Nam*).

The lighting follows the scene's atmosphere, recognized as an enhancer and supporter of the atmosphere. Through lighting, the researcher wants to present atmospheres that convey deep, calm, sacred, tense, and loving emotions to the audience.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The creation of the dance drama titled *Matuya Metta* expresses creative ideas motivated by an interest in Thai literature through the story of Phra Lor. There is a scene when Phra Lor performs the *siang nam* ritual on the Kalong River that shows similarities to the Javanese tradition of *tapa kungkum*. This resemblance inspires the researcher to create a Javanese dance-drama from the story of Phra Lor. The creative process took approximately three months to produce. The full piece is approximately 25 minutes and 46 seconds long.

This project is based on research, from collecting references, practicing, staging, and gathering audience opinions. The researcher concludes that the Phra Lor story from Thai literature could be presented as a Javanese dance-drama in the Yogyakarta style. This piece was performed in front of more than 60 audience members who attended to watch the show in the theater. More than 50% of the audience said that the dance-drama "Matuya Metta" was easy to understand even though it used Javanese song lyrics. The audience acknowledged that the Javanese music used produced a very supportive atmosphere and fit perfectly with Phra Lor's story.

During the process, that researcher could determine the dancers' abilities. Some Thai dancers performed a Javanese dance-drama in the Yogyakarta style. The survey from the audience also indicated that the dancers could show each of the elements well, particularly dance movements, characterization, understanding of musical rhythms, and dialogue by singing in traditional Javanese language and vocal techniques. Cross-cultural collaboration can have a great impact on establishing relations between two countries.

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Creating a dance drama entitled "Matuya Metta" expresses creative ideas motivated by an interest in Thai literature with the story of Phra Lor. There is a scene when Phra Lor performs the *siang nam* ritual on the Kalong River that shows similarities to the Javanese tradition, *tapa kungkum*. This resemblance inspired the

researcher to create a Javanese dance-drama from the story of Phra Lor, showing the potential for cross-cultural collaboration.

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