



The SUPPORT Arts and Crafts
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Artisanal Handicraft

Nok King Ka Rah Dance in Tai Yai Culture



“**King Ka Rah**” is a word in Tai Yai language which is deviated from Kinnarah in Pali. According to the Royal Institute Dictionary, 1999, it means an inhuman being in a myth which can be categorized into 2 types. The first one refers to those with a human being body on top and a bird body in the lower part. The other type refers to those with a human being figure, wearing wings and a tail while travelling. Later on, a term Kinnarah was deviated on how it is pronounced in Thai style as “King Ka Rah”. Tai Yai people in the past normally called it “Nang Nok” instead of “King Ka Rah”.

“**Nok King Ka Rah Dance**” is considered a graceful performing art which reflects identity and belief of Tai Yai in Shan State, Burma. It was later spread over to Thailand in the area of Lanna in the north during migration to Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son. It has been popular and carried on especially in Mae Hong Son where this kind of dance is famous.



Nok King Ka Rah Costume is considered as a craft which is made based on imagination by applying available materials to make a Kinnarah, a Himmaman creature. According to ancient belief, this Kinnarah performed dancing to welcome the Lord Buddha on the end of Buddhist Lent Day. Major components of Nok King Ka Rah costume include wings, a tail and a body. Structure of the wings and a tail is made of a bamboo which is sharpened and attached with cloth, such as lacework or silk. Then, it is tied with a rope so that the wings and a tail can be stretched out like a bird's wings. The rope is hooked with the

wrist to control the dancing. A body part is a blouse and trousers in the same color. In the past, this costume came with the wings and a tail separately. However, at present the wings and a tail are made together as one piece for more convenience. In the past, mulberry paper dyed in different colors was used to decorate to make it more beautiful. The dancing was performed by old men in a mask instead of wearing makeup. Mostly, a tailor also taught how to dance. They are Tai Yai people and are ready to pass this cultural wisdom down to their ancestors.



Nok King Ka Rah's wings

Nok King Ka Rah Costume Identity

Nok King Ka Rah costume consists of 3 parts, including the wings, a tail and a body. The wings and a tail are made of a bamboo or rattan. The wings are around 70 centimeters long and 100 centimeters wide. As for a body part, a dancer wears a dress in the same color as the wings and a tail. (There is only a tail in some places.)

A mask is made by forming clay as a model or a mold, have it glued with mulberry paper. Once it is dried, paint it white to be ready for further decoration. A mask is not commonly used at present. Colorful cloth is used to wrap around the head similar to dressing of Look Kaew or Sang Long of Tai Yai people. A long sleeved blouse and shorts are worn loosely. Pieces of colored cloth or lacework are sawn attaching to a neckband. Shoulder- straps are crossed over around the chest and the back. The elbow and the wrist are decorated with jewel. The jewel decorated around the knees and the ankles makes it look like a butterfly.





Background of the belief of Nok King Ka Rah Dance

Nok King Ka Rah Dance is part of celebration during the end of Buddhist Lent Day of Tai Yai people which has been carried on for many hundred years. Due to the fact that Tai Yai people are very strictly religious in Buddhism, the end of Buddhist Lent Day, which falls on the 15th day of the waxing moon on the 11th lunar month, is therefore considered very important as it is deemed the day when Lord Buddha descended from Tavatimsa Realm to the earth.

According to the history of Lord Buddha, it has been mentioned that after staying in during the Buddhist Lent and offered preach to his mother in Tushita Realm, Lord Buddha descended to listen to Dhamma preach in Tavatimsa Realm. On the 1st day of the waning moon on the 11th lunar month, Lord Buddha descended to the earth along all 3 divine ladders, namely, a silver ladder, a golden ladder and a glass ladder. Indra, therefore, requested



Vishnu to make a ladder from Tavatimsa Realm to the earth. All Himmaman creatures, angel musicians in strange shapes and human, therefore, made preparations for a performance and danced in delight to welcome the return of Lord Buddha.

Tai Yai people adhered to events in the history of the Buddha as tradition that has been carried on. They made a copy of costume to wear and dance like Himmaman creatures to welcome Lord Buddha. They normally wore dresses with wings and a tail like King Ka Rah bird and danced like a bird according to their own imagination. This is called Nok King Ka Rah Dance which will be performed at the end of Buddhist Lent day.

Once this dancing had become famous, it was performed in other occasions apart from the end of Buddhist Lent day in Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai.

With the imagination that King Ka Rah is a half-man bird, Tai Yai people wear a dress having wings, a tail and a body as a bird. The graceful dance reflects identity and way of living of Tai Yai community from the past up to the present time, especially in Mae Hong Son. At present, each place has its own design and it is called differently.



The Art of Nok King Ka Rah Dance Which Reflects the Life of Tai Yai People

A dancer is skilled in using the wings and a tail while dancing gracefully and in harmony with the rhythm of a drum which plays an important role in defining a gesture.

Dancing is performed as a role-playing of male and female birds such as flying and jumping in harmony with the rhythm of a drum. However, female birds are mostly found, hence this is how a term “Forn Nang Nok” or “Ka Nang Nok” is stemmed from.



Dancing posture imitating nature of birds
(swooping down)



Dancing posture implies 3 aspects of meaning, namely

paying respect to Lord Buddha via a wai or praying posture imitating nature of birds, such as swooping down, showing off wings and preening and showing merriment.



Nok King Ka Rah Dancing Posture

King Ka Rah female birds dancing together represent their pleasure to welcome Lord Buddha for his visit from heaven.

Prostrating while sitting represents utmost respect to Lord Buddha upon his arrival.

Jumping, flipping the left and right leg and moving the head up and down represents how a bird preens its feathers around the wings and a tail.

King Ka Rah while courting, a female bird squatting and dancing along the rhythms and a male bird dancing around a female bird.

Flapping the wings and dancing around to express enjoyment and delight to meet up as a bird. There are some more postures which are initiated or applied by a coach to enhance the dancing.



Important Components of Nok King Ka Rah dance costume

A tail consists of 3 sheets of tail, ranging from a big to a small ones.

The wings, consists of 4 sheets, including 2 big and 2 small ones. They are 1 pair of wings that are attached to the waist, 1 piece as a guise and another one to hang around the neck.

One bird's head

A blouse and trousers with the same color of the wings



Wings and a tail of Nok King Ka Rah



A Process to Make Costume Components

Equipment

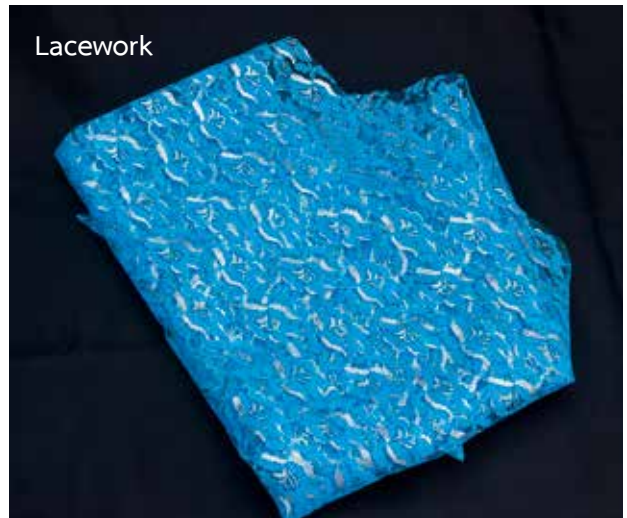
A bamboo, lacework, a field belt, wires, threads, glue, colored paper, pearl coated hardened cloth, braid, lacework, a field belt, wires, electric wires, electric cables with a wire removed, threads, other equipment.

The wings and a tail are made of a bamboo or rattan thanks to its toughness, not too stiff and easily found locally. Split the bamboo into strips. Sharpen them to make them look beautiful. Then, have them dried in the sun to avoid any insect. One dress at a big size would require up to 35-40 strips of bamboo. Put them together to make a structure. Then, cover them with colorful silk fabric. Decorate with pieces of colored paper. Then, put them together by tying with rubber bands, ropes or rattan tightly. Make a rope to control movement of the wings and a tail as a bird. Decoration can vary by location, such as wrapping a piece of cloth around the head, wearing a spike hat or wearing a mask.

Threads



Lacework



Bamboo





Making King Ka Rah costume



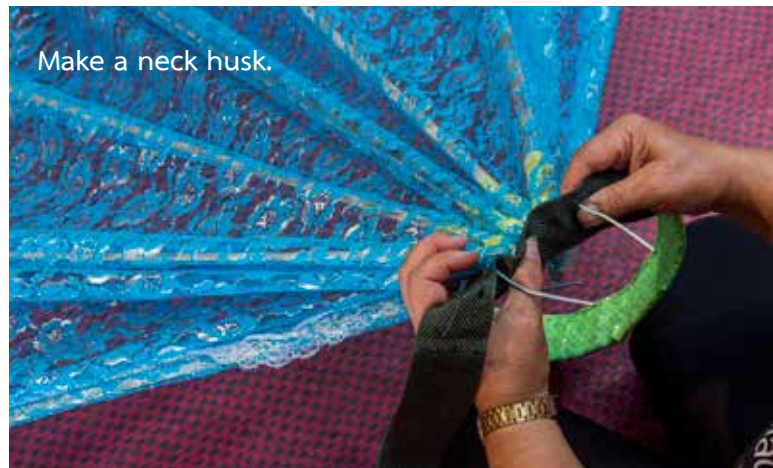
Make a structure of bamboo.



Sew the cloth to attach with the stick.



Make a neck husk.



How to Make a Costume

Cut an old bamboo and split it into strips at the sufficient length. Sharpen it until it looks like a big base with a smaller shape at the other end. Make a hole, big enough to insert a wire. Stick it with colored paper. Cut lacework by the length of the sharpened stick. Lacework in 2 colors will be used, another one will be used to make ornamental fringe at a tail and the wings.

Sew the cloth that was cut to attach with the stick. Insert a wire through a hole. Separate it into pieces by inserting an electric cable and sew it with a belt. Then, decorate it in beautiful colors.

A neck husk is made of hardened cloth that is cut into shape. Attach it with colored cloth and decorate it with pearl

The wings attached to the waist are made of hardened cloth that is cut into a shape of small wings. Sew it with colored cloth similar to that of a neck husk.

A bird's head is decorated by using residues, such as foam in an anti-knock helmet to decorate the neck and the mouth. Gird a wire on a hat and leave its end upward. Insert the neck and the mouth that were cut before into the wire to make a bird's head. Insert paper in the same color as the wings at the bird's head and the hat.



At present, Nok King Ka Rah Dance is performed together with Forn Toh or Tua Toh dancing in delight to welcome Lord Buddha. Tua Toh is a four-foot Himmaman creature. Its head is like that of a fluffy chamois. Some do not have hair, some have a dragon-like head. The mouth is moveable to hold something, especially bank notes as a reward from audiences who enjoy the performance.

At present, this kind of dancing is commonly performed in auspicious ceremonies, such as New Year party, giving new rice ceremony, admiring teacher ceremony, Poi Sang Long ceremony and Poi Son Nam (Songkran) ceremony. However, this dancing is not performed in a wedding ceremony because it is associated with sexual relation. It is not performed in misfortune ceremony either.

Moreover, it is regarded as a performance to serve a society, especially those related to religion or important rites of a city, such as important inauguration in Tai Yai community, official visitors welcoming ceremony.

Nok King Ka Rah Dance is regarded important to community culture. It is considered as an identity of Tai Yai people which is supposed to be reserved for ancestors. It reflects way of life, belief, culture of ethnic through dancing performance and costume. Beautiful costume and graceful dancing posture represent elegance and pleasure, which contribute to the fame and identity of the dancing performance of Mae Hong Son that we should not miss. At present, this kind of arts has been passed on from local teachers to youth through school both in learning courses and studying on their own at teachers' houses. Children start from practicing how to dance. Then, they get to know how to make a costume. One set of performance normally consists of more than 1 female bird to boost liveliness of many animals joining gleefully.



References

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