



Batu Tumbuk as A New Creation Dance: Art and Culture Preservation Through Time

Muhammad Syafiq Azam ^{a,1,*}, Sumathi Maniam ^{b,2}, Muhammad Fazli Taib Saearani ^{c,3}

^a Department of Performing Arts, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia

^b Department of Performing Arts, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia

^c Department of Performing Arts, Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Sultan Idris Education University Malaysia

¹ syafiqazam0698@gmail.com, ²sumathi@upsi.edu.my, ³fazli@fmsp.upsi.edu.my

* Corresponding Author

Received 5 January 2022; accepted 19 May 2022; published 20 July 2022

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the choreography of the New Creation dance, Batu Tumbuk by Muhaldin Jamin, which was staged in 2015. The term 'New Creation dance' refers to the dance that undergoes a process of improvement or refinement that is appropriate to the passage of time but does not affect the traditional values of the community. Hence, this research discusses the Batu Tumbuk dance from the aspect of choreography. The choreographic approach by Minton (1997) is used in this article to discuss the choreographic aspects of the New Creation dance selected. The methodology used for this research was qualitative. Data collection was conducted by using observational methods, unstructured interviews, and library methods. The findings of this research show that the choreography of Batu Tumbuk dance has undergone the creative process of movements and development in terms of composition in the performances presented. Based on the various elements of Malay traditional dance, it is shown that the development processes of Batu Tumbuk dance include actions such as casting, floor patterns and additional props as forms of dance creations. The implications of this research could benefit local choreographers in providing the reference for understanding the terms and concepts of the New Creation dance choreography that continues the original tradition, as a source to be processed and developed in accordance with the passage of time aimed to preserve cultural art heritage.

KEYWORDS

Batu Tumbuk dance, New Creation dance, choreography analysis, Muhaldin Jamin, cultural art preservation.

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1. Introduction

This study focuses on the choreography of New Creation dance by using the subject of *Batu Tumbuk* dance, staged in Inspitari 2015. The concept of performance in Inspitari 2015 is New Creation dance. There are issues in understanding the use of terms and concepts when creating the choreography with a New Creation dance concept. Therefore, the researcher would like to make an analysis on the choreography of *Batu Tumbuk* New Creation dance to identify the process of its creation from the specific aspect of choreography.

In this research, the researcher aims to analyze and study in detail about the choreography of New Creation dance that forms a new notion in creating a new dance but takes the main source from the existing traditional culture, tradition, or dance. According to Minton (1997), choreography is a creative process that requires training as well as some knowledge of how the process works. Based on the statement, choreography is the process of creating a dance based on thoughts and ideas to be translated in the form of movement systems that have certain stages. These stages have a function related to the thoughts and ideas to be conveyed through movement.

Choreography is an aspect that plays a big role in terms of the process of creating the form of dance. In the form of dance performances in particular, the aspect of choreography is very much emphasized to present the main motifs, ideas, identity, culture, tradition, messages, and other related aspects. It is interconnected with the movement system to give meaning to the audience through non-verbal way.



Next, the object of study is *Batu Tumbuk* which is a form of performance art in the dance category. According to Kaeppler (1978), a dance is a cultural form that results from creative processes which manipulate human bodies in time and space. The cultural form produced, though transient, has structured content, is a visual manifestation of social relations, and may be the subject of an elaborate aesthetic system. From that statement, it is derived that dance is a form of culture created based on creativity by using the body as depicting images to social relationships and a more complex aesthetic system through space and time. The researcher concludes that *Batu Tumbuk* dance is categorized as a form of dance culture because it has undergone a creative process involving the movement system of the human body through the passage of time and place. *Batu Tumbuk* dance also conveys a clear picture of social relations in the Malay community in Malaysia. Furthermore, this creation includes the use of pestle and mortar, which is a tool used by the Malay community in Malaysia in the process of preparation of cooking ingredients, as the main object in this work.

The passage of time is a major factor in discussing the issue of demand and the desire of a dance to be created in parallel and appropriate to a particular place and time. However, according to Shahril Akla through an interview, the obvious problem is in terms of the choreography of a new creative dance that is not well conveyed in presenting the identity of a community (Shahril Akla, interview, 12 November 2020). For example, a New Dance creation inspired by the community or Malay traditional dance is prepared for the process of adding some values, streamline dance moves and rejuvenation but it overshadows the original identity as choreographers nowadays are more imaginative in making dance creations such as new creative dance, and contemporary dance.

The matter was also supported by Muhaldin Jamin through interviews, mentioning that there were a few choreographer friends who stated that the new creative dance in Malaysia is contemporary dance (Muhaldin Jamin, 10 October 2020). This situation is in conflict with the terms and concepts of the new creation dance. This is indeed the case, according to Tati Narawati et al. (2017), stating that "New Creation dance is a dance that is developed in accordance with the development of the times, but basically does not eliminate the values of tradition itself". According to the statement, the New Creation dance has evolved from the existing dance and does not eliminate the traditional values that exist in a dance that is used to vary over time. This is in stark contrast to contemporary dance which is independent and has no specific boundaries in the production of dance choreography.

In addition, most choreographies created by choreographers in their New Creation dance nowadays are meant to only feature variations but not emphasizing the traditional values that need to be preserved. This poses a problem in the production of similar choreography such as creative dance and contemporary dance in Malaysia. Based on the statement of the problem, the issues of the problem prompted the researcher to conduct this research.

Therefore, the objective of the research is to identify the New Creation dance of *Batu Tumbuk* by Muhaldin Jamin, in terms of the synopsis of the work, background, and form of performance. In addition, the researcher will analyze the choreography of *Batu Tumbuk* New Creation dance in terms of movement, time, technique, and style.

The researcher has conducted surveys on secondary sources, namely books, theses, journals, and articles. Malaysia is one of the countries located in Southeast Asia that is rich in various arts, cultures, and traditions. Art is one of the developmental factors of culture, for a race or society. Therefore, an art such as the dance, is produced by the people and the idea of creating dance in those days is based on community life, the motive of its movement is inspired by the daily activities of the community and connects with settlement factors. This does not directly reflect the identity of a society. For instance, the name of a dance is influenced by, and created in, a settlement, such as *Zapin Tanjung Labuh* which originates from Kampung Tanjung Labuh in Batu Pahat, Johor. In another example, the dance as based on community life can also be conveyed by the term movement, found in Terengganu's *Gamelan Dance* which depicts collecting flowers, inspired by community life in the past.

In the past, dance was one of the social activities especially for the Malays. It was different from the dance created in the palace, which was a performance presented as entertainment for the kings.



During its development, the art of dance can be performed and staged for the public, as well as be enjoyed together during gatherings, cultural events, performances, dance competitions, and various other events, resulting in the emergence of many genres and dance terms used in Malaysia.

Apart from that, there are various dance genres categorized by the local community in Malaysia, which are classical, traditional, folk, ethnic, New Creation, contemporary dances, and many others. However, one of the most popular dance genres by the local community, especially among choreographers, dancers, and spectators today, is the New Creation dance. The use of New Creation dance term or concept attracts the researcher to conduct this study because the word *kreasi* is not originated from Malaysia, and most New Creation dance works resemble creative and contemporary dances.

In general, the basic term for the word *kreasi* is originated from Indonesia, because the word *kreasi* is not found in the Malaysian dictionary and the library. The Malay society in Malaysia are influenced by the people of Indonesia as linguistically, they have so much in common with the Indonesians, in terms of the words used. In fact, the term of New Creation dance is also influenced by the culture and art of Indonesian society.

Moreover, Minton (1997) has stated that choreography is a creative process that requires training as well as some knowledge of how the process works. Based on the statement, choreography is the process of creating a dance based on thoughts and ideas to be translated in the form of movement systems that have certain stages. These stages have a function related to the thoughts and ideas to be conveyed through movement.

Further, Forsythe (2011) has stated too that choreography is the term that presides over a class of ideas, where an idea is, perhaps in this case, a thought or suggestion as to a possible course of action.

Based on the statement, choreography can be termed as the process of creating a work that begins with a thought or idea. In choreography, all actions performed are based on the possibilities of what the choreographer thinks. According to Shahril Akla (2018), choreography is the translation of ideas, thoughts, opinions, participation, and creativity that is interpreted in a structured way into dance that has a form. Therefore, choreography is a way to express and translate the ideas, thoughts, and creativity of a choreographer towards the formation of dance created. It is a process of dance implementation before becoming a form of dance desired by the choreographer. Each implementation process for a dance is different and depends on the desire of the choreographer.

According to Kaeppler (1972) in the book entitled 'Method and Theory in Analyzing Dance Structure with an Analysis of Tongan Dance', the methods are explained as the following:

"Using descriptive tools, they record a dance as it occurs during a particular performance, often second-hand because it is usually done from motion picture. This procedure yields a description of how a dance was performed on a particular occasion. A corpus of material can be collected and described in this way, making it possible to analyse from the observer's point of view the structure of various types of dances existing in a society and to isolate traits such as movement patterns, motifs, lines of direction and repetitions."

Based on the statement, the researcher who uses a descriptive approach will explain a dance in terms of how it is done during a particular performance, usually not through the first person, because it usually involves video recording. This procedure will describe how a dance is performed at a particular time. Some materials can be collected and elaborated by analyzing from the observer's point of view on the structure of various types of dances that exist in a society and to isolate properties such as movement patterns, motifs, direction lines and repetition.

From the previous studies, there appears to be a research gap as the previous researchers did not discuss the choreography performed on the New Creation dance, its structure, and the connection between the dance and the traditional dances, which need to be discussed, especially in Malaysia. Issues related to the New Creation dance raise many questions to the researcher as well as the local



community, which encourages the researcher to conduct this study in detail, especially in the chosen choreography of New Creation dance of *Batu Tumbuk* as the primary material focused on, in this study.

2. Method

In general, this study is in a qualitative form with a descriptive approach to obtain data or the whole information regarding the choreography of New Creation dance, by using the subject of the study, the *Batu Tumbuk* dance. The primary source of informant for this study is the choreographer who created the dance, Muhaldin Jamin, who is a former choreographer at JKKN Selangor, now a choreographer at JKKN Kuala Lumpur.

Among the methods used by the researcher to obtain research materials or information are primary sources and secondary sources. The primary source of the researcher is based on observations and unstructured interviews. Observations were made by watching the video of the *Batu Tumbuk* dance staged during the event of Inspitari 2015, while the unstructured interview was conducted with the choreographer who created this *Batu Tumbuk* dance. Interview sessions were conducted in audio form as evidence of the meeting and reference for the researcher.

Next, the secondary source covers the reading materials obtained from books, theses, journals, and newspapers, as well as the *Batu Tumbuk* dance video, which is available from online sources (Youtube). Based on the findings from information and study sources, the researcher will conduct a general survey and observation of the *Batu Tumbuk* dance and analyze the choreography of the dance in detail.

5. Results and Discussion

The synopsis for *Batu Tumbuk* dance is as the following. The dance itself draws inspirations from the ideology that emerged from a combination of dance moves formed through the activities of rural communities in Malaysia, namely chilli-picking, and chilli-pounding movements, by using the pestle and mortars. According to Muhaldin Jamin from an interview session, this dance is themed on love. The value of this love is focused on the husband and the wife (Muhaldin Jamin, interview, 10 October 2020). In this dance creation, the choreographer describes the male dancer as portraying the husband, while the female dancer portrays the wife. The short story illustrating this dance creation is, the husband is a farmer that brings the crops produced, which are the chillies, while the wife pounds the chillies brought back by the husband, by using a pestle and mortar.

The choreographer has also used the elements of acting to show the atmosphere of Malay people living in the village during the old days. The choreographer also emphasizes the element of humor between the husband and the wife, and the element of teasing, to cheer up the dance atmosphere. The idea of the choreographer is focused on the tradition of using 'smashing stones', also known as the pestle and mortar. The choreographer fears that this tradition would be lost, due to the changes and developments of practices in modern times, where most people nowadays use more convenient facilities available today, for example, a blender. The purpose of the choreographer creating this dance is to revive the tradition of using pestle and mortar so that it is not forgotten by the younger or future generations.

According to Muhaldin Jamin in the interview session, the Inspitari Program organized by JKKN is based on the concept of a New Creation dance. The choreographers for each state of JKKN will create a New Creation dance that re-elevates an existing traditional dance, or a New Creation dance which is based on the environment (Muhaldin Jamin, interview, 10 October 2020). The Inspitari Program is indeed a program that challenges the choreographers for each state of JKKN to produce a new work with the concept of a New Creation dance.

For the *Batu Tumbuk* dance, the choreographer has revived the tradition of using pestle and mortar by implementing the concept of folk dance to become the form of New Creation dance. Based on the pestle and mortar which is a tradition for Malay society in Malaysia, the choreographer has created a dance that reflects the Malay society. In terms of costumes, the concept of clothing used is traditional Malay clothing in Malaysia. For female dancers' costumes,



short kebaya that are sewn to become short sleeves, cut up to the top of the elbows and waist using peplum cuts, and matched with batik fabric. Accessories used are headbands, necklaces, and bracelets to enhance the fashion.

For male dancers, the costumes used are folk shirts and pants depicting the old days, which are also minimally sewn and matched with batik clothes used the sides and accompanied by the waist bands and headbands. According to the choreographer, the costumes used in this dance are the result of refinement, and these costumes have been given a new element according to the suitability of the dancers' movements and changes of time. The costumes are also designed to attract young people to get to know the traditional clothes so that they are not forgotten.

The props used in this dance are 'smashing stones', also known as pestle and mortar, and baskets. The function of these props is to show the use of traditional tools of Malay people living in villages in the old days. The use of baskets as props relate to the tool to place the harvested chillies, while the use of 'smashing stones', is to pound the chillies. The main props in this dance are the 'smashing stones' because the choreographer wanted to focus on the tradition of using these in the process of preparing cooking ingredients, and it is feared that this practice will no longer exist due to the changes in modern times. The music that accompanies the *Batu Tumbuk* dance is a New Creation song inspired by folk songs with the concept of *inang* rhythm. The *inang* rhythm has been adapted and varied to feature a more dynamic rhythm in this music. There are modern elements applied in this music to adapt to the current situation and feature variations, such as the *gurindam* with opera concept by using high tones and the use of modern musical instruments such as bass guitar and keyboard, as well as sound effects' instruments.

Choreography is the process of creating a dance based on thoughts and ideas to be translated into a form of movement system that has certain stages. These stages have a function related to the thoughts and ideas to be delivered through movement. Movement is the most important aspect to be analyzed in a dance choreography because the delivery of a dance is basically through the body as the main instrument, portraying the message, and traditional values are conveyed through a structured movement system. According to Youngerman (1975), the description of the dance movement is to provide sufficient cultural data to outline the context and the general role of dance throughout the society. The dance movement can describe the whole picture and function of a culture and community life. From the dance movement, the researcher can also discuss the culture and identity of the existing community based on a creation of a movement.

Based on the *Batu Tumbuk* dance, the movement of the dance symbolizes the culture of the Malay community in Malaysia. In this case, there are techniques of movement and position of the foot frequently used in traditional Malay dance movement and position of the feet on the ground. This movement and position are often used in various dances such as *Asli*, *Inang*, *Zapin* and *Joget*. This movement and position contrast with that of western culture, which is more elevated and vertical. It also reflects the politeness in the Malay culture in Malaysia, slightly bending down while walking in front of the older individuals, to show respect to the older people.

Next, there are the movement and position of the Malay culture that is symbolized by the role of the foot in the position of *kekuda*, which are often used by male dancers in this dance. *Kekuda* is the position of the foot that is opened on both sides of the foot with a moderate width towards the side and in a low position. This position is derived from the Malay *silat* in Malaysia. This leg position is the most stable and strong position for self-defence, or to attack the opponent. This position is also often used in traditional Malay dance for male dancers to accentuate the characteristic strength and masculinity of a man to protect the women.

Furthermore, there are also movements of pounding the chillies by using the pestle and mortar. This movement also reflects the tradition of the community in the past, where these daily activities are often carried out by women, punching and pulverizing ingredients before cooking.

However, the researcher has noticed that this movement in *Batu Tumbuk* dance is literal and not as a movement that is converted into a dance movement. This is so, according to Muhaldin Jamin (2020) who is the choreographer for this dance where he stated that "Some people in Malaysia are less interested in seeing a staged or abstract dance performance. They prefer to see something that is straightforward so that they can understand it more easily". Based on the statement, the



choreographer deliberately makes a literal movement so that it is easy to deliver, and the audience will be able to receive the message intended.

Below are the photos of the dancers while performing the *Batu Tumbuk* dance:



Source: <https://youtu.be/XY6UqeloYLI>



Source: <https://youtu.be/cO7RkzllhAo>

In terms of time or meter, fast tempo is used to perform this dance. This is because it follows the tempo of the accompanying music of the dance. The fast-paced use of tempo creates lively music and influences the dancers to perform energetic movements.

The style of the dance is a reaction that results from the behaviour of movements, on whether the dancers move or do not move, through the space used and the time allocated. The style refers to a trait that highlights the character of the dancers as desired by the choreographer. This is also agreed by Smith-Autard (2004), stating that

“Style is one of the features which makes for distinction, but it is also influenced by the cultural and artistic practices of particular times and places”.

Based on that statement, it is derived that the style is a characteristic to distinguish a work of dance but also influenced by a cultural or artistic practice at a particular time and place.

For *Batu Tumbuk* dance, according to Muhaldin Jamin, this dance portrays the Malay community style who live in the village where the cultural practices and traditions that involve picking up and pounding the chillies, or the communities who lived in the during the old days. The style is developed as according to the preference of the community according to the suitability at the time when the dance was created (Muhaldin Jamin, interview, 10 October 2020). The changes that have occurred in terms of the style is a little obscure in the image of Malay femininity in the past. This is because, in the past, the nature of Malay women is portrayed as being more polite, beautiful, and shy. These qualities can be seen in terms of the movements of the women who are delicate, graceful, and smaller in stature in terms of their natural body curves, and not artificial. These qualities also reflect an introverted style of Malay women but has evolved to become extrovert as according to the requirements of this choreographer, who created the dance based on relevance with the changing times.

In addition, the choreographer has also applied the elements of humour in married couples through the dance movements. This is to show the cheeky or light-hearted atmosphere to attract the audience, for example when the wife is cooking, the husband is teasing and joking with his wife. This situation undoubtedly plays a role in capturing the attention of the people in the community who watch and appreciate the theme of love brought along with the issue of preserving the tradition of using the pestle and mortar.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study have answered the research questions and issues on choreography, especially in the New Creation dance by using *Batu Tumbuk* dance as a research sample. Without



the results of this study, the questions, and problems in the choreography of the New Creation dance might continue to be neglected and unaddressed.

Based on the findings of the research, the choreography of the New Creation dance is created by a community tradition, or a traditional dance created with the aim of continuing the form of tradition to be accepted by the society as the time passes. This matter is also considered as an effort in preserving the cultural and artistic heritage in Malaysia. Changes and developments that occur in a New Creation dance choreography to a community tradition or traditional dance could attract the interest and attention of the local community today in appreciating the dance art and culture.

Problems and questions that occur about the choreography of New Creation dance are due to the lack of understanding and guidance, especially in the form of writing that can be read and understood in the meaning, concept and especially in the creation of choreography. So far, the use of the term New Creation dance in the creation of choreography is a follow-up to watching dance performances intended as community entertainment, where the lack of understanding is evident in the creation of New Creation dance choreography that emphasizes development in terms of developing new forms that could be accepted by the society today. The creation of the choreography of this dance is in stark contrast to the contemporary dance, which is independent and does not require elements of tradition. Similarly, creative dances in Malaysia are created according to the creativity of choreographers who aim to entertain the community and compete among each other in terms of creativity without emphasizing the care of a form of tradition or traditional dance that are the main sources of inspiration.

Implications for this research could provide valuable sources of reference to the local community in producing a New Creation dance choreography based on the community tradition or traditional dance, parallel with the terms and concepts of New Creation dance. Creation in choreography should have continuity from the old tradition or the original tradition taken as a source, to be developed, processed, and refined until it becomes a new form.

Further research is needed, especially in the genre of New Creation dance. This is due to the role of related future research to provide the reference to the local community, especially to the choreographers in Malaysia, so that the creation of choreography in the New Creation dance does not conflict with the appropriate use of its terms and concepts. The creation of a choreography that uses the terms and concepts of a New Creation dance that is appropriate can indeed produce a new form that is acceptable to the local community and is likely to be a new tradition to be followed.

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