



Rabam Jawa: transcultural performance and aesthetic transformation of Javanese identity in Thai Dance



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ABSTRACT

This research investigates Rabam Jawa (ระบำชาวา) as a case to show a complex case of cultural representation blending Java and Thai culture. It is not just a replication of Javanese dance, but such an act of cultural appropriation and aesthetic transformation where a Thai mode of Javanese-imaginary is constructed. The study integrates Maruska Svasek's theory of cultural transit and Julie Sander's concept of appropriation that employs a qualitative and interpretive analysis. Through Svasek and Sanders, this research analyzes how cultural product is not just transferred into another style, but actively recreated, which enriches the aesthetic paradigm of cross-cultural identity. The primary fieldwork was started in 2016 through interviews with senior dancers and a Thai national artist, and focus group discussions with teachers from Lopburi, Angtong, and Suphanburi College of Dramatic Art. This data was supplemented by ongoing choreographic observation and literature studies. The findings reveal the aesthetic domestication of Javanese performing elements (movement, music, and costume), mixed and transformed into Thai performance. This research contributes to transcultural performance studies by showing how Thai culture appropriates and styles foreign elements.



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1. Introduction

When I visited Suphanburi for the second time, I heard a familiar Bamboo sound coming from a music class. As an Indonesian scholar, I thought it was an Angklung ensemble from West Java. However, when I heard the song again, it sounded more like a Thai song. Navee told me that it was an Angkalung (Thai bamboo instrument) that is usually used to play Rabam Jawa (ระบำชาวา) music. My curiosity drove me to watch the full performance on the YouTube platform and watch Suphanburi's teacher practice the dance and music. I noticed Javanese influences in the way they moved fingers and scarves. While I could not feel the Javanese dance aesthetic there, I felt there was a Thai sense in the dancer's presentational quality. I felt a sense of closeness and strangeness simultaneously. This experience led me to wonder how and why Javanese (foreign cultural identity) is constructed and performed in Thai dance. In order to understand that transformation, the fundamental aspects that shape Thai classical dance are monarchy and religiosity. The primary patron came from the kingdom that shaped its aesthetic form through rules and standards; it focused on grace, precision, and control [1]. Simultaneously, Hindu-Buddhist syncretism provided narrative substance and performance ethos of emotional restraint [2]. As it is important in the life cycle, it becomes a medium of learning and gives meaning to life. For instance, from the well-known Hindu epic Ramakien (Ramayana). These things show that cultural interaction has been going on; the transcultural performance of intra-Asian culture has begun to be explored by scholars [3]–[5].

The interaction between court-to-court appropriation happens in Southeast Asia [6], [7], including Thailand and Java. Those particular cases are not driven by colonial power, but by royal fascination and reconstruction from fragmented resources [7], [8]. The process of choreographic and aesthetic transformation in dances by such encounters remains underanalyzed. This study contributes to filling the gap by investigating Rabam Jawa as a specific case of intra-Asian cultural remaking beyond the “influence” notions. Piyawadee Makpa [9]. The Thai dance term usually refers to court style, regional dances, and folk dances of the various tribes living in Thailand. Based on the regional dances, there are northern, southern, northeastern, and central styles, each with its own characteristics. The central Thai style is canonised in standards, and it is preserved by the government and academia. The northeastern style has fewer finger movements compared to the classical style or the dynamic southern nora dance. That southern style has an open leg position and expressive finger movement. The northern style is often slow in a legato movement, as in the former Thai kingdom. Rabam in the Thai language means dance; the term is commonly used in Central Thailand. Rabam is the ancient word that means choreographed dances for specific functions and occasions [10]. According to Kaewprasert and Rompochuen [11], Rabam in Thailand is a culturally rich group dance form that can be creatively adapted to preserve and promote local heritage. Local people are categorized as Rabam Matrathan (ระบำมาตรฐาน) and Rabam Bettalee (ระบำเบ็ดเตล็ด). Rabam Matrathan is a group that refers to classical Thai dances, so it has standardized rules for the performance elements. It is the foundation for learning Thai classical dance. Themes are often performed about mythology, gods and goddesses, or heavenly beings. However, Rabam Bettalee is a category for all dances outside the standard repertoire. Dances in this category emphasize aspects of creativity with various themes such as representation of art in certain periods, flora, fauna, or adaptations and appropriations from foreign cultures [1]. Rabam Jawa is categorized as a Rabam Bettalee based on the deliberate status and represents foreign culture.

The creation of Rabam Jawa derived from two key sources from King Chulalongkorn’s state visit to Java at the turn of the 20th century: a photograph of a Javanese court dancer and song, titled *Yawa Mai* (New Java) and *Buzenzok* (Buitenzorg-Bogor). Songs that were composed by the court musician named Laung Pradhit Pailah. This study employs a dual theoretical framework from Maruska Svasek’s theory of cultural transit to trace how Javanese elements moved and transformed. Julie Sanders’s concept of appropriation is used to analyze the power dynamics and creative choices involved. This article argues an aesthetic domestication exemplified by Rabam Jawa. A process where foreign elements are reinterpreted into Thai dance. This study contributes to transcultural performance studies with an empirical case study in Rabam Jawa. How the historical creation and the aesthetic transformation of the intra-Asian culture. Theoretically, it contributes to the operationally dual theory of Svasek and Sanders in a non-Western but court-to-court context. The aesthetic domestication demonstrates how cultural appropriation functions not as an act of colonial dominance, but as a strategy by an elite to appropriate selectively and stylize foreign elements, not just simply imitate, but enrich both aesthetic paradigms and cultural identity.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative study in a collaborative and cross-cultural ethnographic approach that entails a systematic and objective examination of cultural phenomena, encompassing a comparative analysis of data, experiences, and cultural patterns across diverse groups or locations. This methodology facilitates a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity and its underlying similarities [12]. To comprehend the intricacies and particularities of the Rabam Jawa’s aspect, a collaborative research approach was undertaken. The team comprised two Indonesians with expertise in dance studies and ethnomusicology, and one Thai researcher who specialized in dance. This collaboration enriches the information and allows for a dialogic and multi-perspectival analysis that mitigates misinterpretation in the interpretive process. This research’s primary data was collected in Thailand starting in August 2016. The credibility and completeness of understanding are reached with methodological and researcher triangulation. Interviews were conducted to gather information from expert knowledge and oral histories. We selected informants by using purposive sampling based on their connection with Rabam Jawa. The main informant of this research is Mrs. Ratchana Peaungprayong (84

years old), who works as a Thai national artist. She is a student of the creator or choreographer Rabam Jawa. That interview was conducted to explore the history and creative process of creating Rabam Jawa. To validate her information, interviews were conducted with three senior dancers and teachers from Lopburi, Angtong, and Suphanburi College of Dramatic Arts, Thailand. Both researchers from Indonesia and Thailand were present as interviewers and were enabled to provide immediate clarification of language and cultural context. A crucial follow-up interview was conducted by our Thai co-author in 2019 to clarify details and validate earlier interpretations. Focus group discussion with eight teachers from the dance and music departments at Suphanburi College of Dramatic Arts. It was conducted to observe the variety of movements, presentation form, development, and transmission process of Rabam Jawa in Thailand. The Thai co-author participated not only as a researcher but also as a peer-practitioner, which facilitated technical discussion. The Indonesian researchers acted as external observers. Those things allow for exploring an emic (from the Thai perspective) and an etic (from the Indonesian viewpoint) perspective in Rabam Jawa.

Observation was conducted during the rehearsal of the teacher and students at Suphanburi College of Dramatic Arts, Thailand. The approach used was participatory. The Thai researcher can analyze the movements from the Thai perspective, while the Indonesian researcher can analyze the movements from an outsider perspective to mark the similarities and differences that exist in Rabam Jawa movement vocabulary. Observation recorded by sound and photos with permission. Beyond the initial fieldwork, this research continues to gather data through 2023. The observation includes the analysis of recent performance videos uploaded on YouTube and involves an ongoing review of newly published academic literature, both Thai and English. The data analysis was processed collaboratively and iteratively. Each researcher independently opens coding on a sample of the data to identify the initial concept based on their cultural background. The subsequent stage of the research process involves a discussion of the codes and each finding. This synthesis of the analysis was undertaken to mitigate individual perspective bias. Subsequently, placing into interpretation through the theoretical framework of Svasek's cultural transit and Sanders' appropriation. This framework helped to structure our collective findings of how and why the aesthetic transformation in Rabam Jawa occurred.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Historical Precedent: Inao and the Performance of "Javanese" in Thailand

The creation of Rabam Jawa was not an isolated event but a continuation of a long-established tradition of the Siamese court appropriating and domesticating Javanese cultural products. Throughout history, the most notable interaction between these two cultures has been the adaptation and appropriation of the Panji story into Thai court drama, named Inao. The Panji story originates from Kediri, East Java, which narrates the love journey of Raden Panji Inu Kertapati and Galuh Candrakirana, who disguise themselves on a mission to find each other. During the Majapahit kingdom, Panji stories were very popular. This is evident in the Majapahit court culture and the numerous depictions of Panji stories on narrative reliefs found in Majapahit temples. As Majapahit's power expanded, as shown for instance in the conquest of Bali in 1364 AD, Panji stories spread to other parts of the Indonesian archipelago. Panji tales gained recognition in mainland Southeast Asia, serving as an indicator of the extent of Majapahit's political, economic, and cultural influence [13]. In the Siamese court, this Javanese narrative was not merely translated, but underwent a profound aesthetic and ideological transformation. The word "Inao" corresponds to the name of Inu or Ino character which is often used to refer to Panji in Javanese. Furthermore, the word "Bussaba" comes from the Sanskrit name *puspa* that means flower, or in Javanese, called "*sekar*". The name *Sekar* is related to *Sekartaji*, another nickname for Princess Candrakirana [13]. Inao and Bussaba's figures were integrated into Thai court literature and were written by kings like Rama II. Rutnin argued that Inao was elevated to the highest status, performed alongside the national epic Ramakien. This process demonstrates a crucial pattern that the Siamese court's capacity to appropriate a foreign narrative, strip it from its cultural context, and recodify it to the Thai aesthetic and society. This established a model of royal patronage borrowing to understand the context of

Rabam Jawa creation. While there is no direct narrative connection between the story and plot of Inao and Rabam Jawa, their relationship is deeply intertwined within performance practice. According to the Thai co-author and dance teachers in the FGD, the Inao drama is staged in two different costumes, those are using Thai court attire, Fig. 1 (a), and another featuring Javanese style, Fig. 1 (b). Fig 1 is the Thai interpretation of Javanese court dress.



Fig. 1. Inao in Javanese costume [15]

It is primarily within the context of these Javanese costume Inao performances that Rabam Jawa is often presented, typically as an opening dance or interlude. This performative link is crucial in revealing that Rabam Jawa functions to emphasize the Javanese mood and setting for the main drama. It is not telling Inao's story, but it drives one to imagine the cultural context in which it takes place. So, in Inao's performance, there is a space which Rabam Jawa inhabits and enriches the creation of the Javanese imaginary in Thai dance.

3.2. Reconstructing Java from Memory, Sound, and Image

Rabam Jawa was created by dancers and choreographers from the Royal Palace. According to Ratchana Peaungprayoong, our key informant, who was one of the first dancers, identified that the choreographers are Lamun Yamakub and Pan Molakun, but in written sources, Pratin Phuengsamlee [16] attributes this work to a team of three, including Mallee Kongraphat. Three of them represent the pivotal bridge in the two political eras. They were the last royal dancers trained under the absolute monarchy who had become pioneering dance teachers at the first College of Dramatic Arts. In this role, they were tasked not only with preserving tradition but also creating new works for a modernizing nation. It also consistently reported that they had never visited Java nor formally studied its dance tradition repertoire. Their main source material to know the visual Javanese dance form is photographs of Javanese dancers that were taken during King Rama V's historic visit. Historical accounts detail the King's exposure to various Javanese court arts, including a performance of the Serimpi and Bedhaya dances at the courts of Surakarta and Yogyakarta [17]. However, there was no direct artistic transmission, so choreographers processed the Rabam Jawa based on a static picture and two two-dimensional images. It reduced the fluid and decontextualized it from their ritual function and kinesthetic principles. It forced them to interpret these frozen poses through their own deeply ingrained bodily knowledge and aesthetic vocabulary of Thai classical dance.

Their auditory trigger is from the Angklung ensemble that was brought to Thailand by Luang Pradit Pailah (หลวงประดิษฐไพเราะ) in 1908. His song, especially *Yawa Mai* and *Buzenzok*, was auditory inspired, and mapped the movement. What Ricklefs [18] reveals leads to an understanding of the productive relationship that was established, which continued when Mataram was still in Kartasura during the time of Amangkurat II, by sending an art team as an ambassador to Siam. Surasak Janmongsarn said that Javanese dance and *gendhing* have been in the Thai court since Mataram was still in Kartasura. The VOC archives record that the Thai court requested Javanese dancers from Kartasura. This series of events determined the development of Javanese art in Thailand in the following period. King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V) made several trips to Java during his reign. He was the first Thai king to make these trips. King Chulalongkorn made his second trip (May 9 - August 12, 1896) to Batavia (Jakarta), Buitenzorg

(Bogor), Garut, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surakarta, and Surabaya. During this interval, on June 6, the King traveled from Bandung to Garut and encountered the *angklung* instrument. Suharto (2012) stated that on both sides of the way to the hotel, local people played music from a kind of bamboo instrument called the *angklung*. King Chulalongkorn saw Serimpi dance and Gambyong dance in Surakarta when he was travelling to Java. On his trip, the King brought along a musician named Laung Phadit Pailah. The musician then summoned his memory to be presented in Thailand by composing a song.

The songs include (1) *Busensok* (Buitenzorg/Bogor), which is used as one of the main songs in the Thai version of the Javanese Dance performance. (2) The composition entitled “*Yawa/Java*” emulates the musical subtleties characteristic of Java, thus constituting a pivotal element within the repertoire of Javanese dance performances in Thailand. (3) The composition known as “*Yawa Mai*” is a new version of the Javanese song. It is employed as a piece to accompany Rabam Jawa in the fast tempo section. (4) “*Kaharad Raya*” is the title of a song which derives its name from a location within the Malay or Javanese region. (5) The appellation “*Kediri*” that is employed in the song’s title corresponds to the name of the city of Kediri in East Java. (6) “*Semarang*”, the title of a song, corresponds to the city in Central Java. (7) The seventh point pertains to the city of *Yahor/Johor* in Malaysia, which functioned as a stopover en route to Java. (8) “*Bugantumo*” is the title of a song derived from the name of a location situated along the route to Java. However, there is a paucity of specific data explaining the location of the city, whether it is a city in Java or a stopover trip after visiting Java [19]. The findings of the musical accompaniment of Rabam Jawa have historically relied on the utilisation of *Busensok* and *Yawa Mai*. As stated by Surasak, the presence of *Angklung* in Thailand was brought by other Siam kings after the visit of King Chulalongkorn (Rama V). The shape of the *Angkalung* instrument is similar to the Sundanese *Angklung*. According to historical records, the Thai-Indonesian musical relationship increased after a set of Sundanese *angklung* was brought to Thailand. He not only bought instruments but also repertory, and in either aspect, changes were made in multiple ways to make the original *Angklung* more “Thai”. The pitch frequency was adjusted to Thai music while physically it changed by adding another bamboo tube to the 2 existing tubes [3].

3.3. Imagine Java through Appropriation and Transformation

Rabam Jawa was first performed by Ratchana Peaungprayoong in 1954. At that time, the choreographers selected 6 (six) people in the school to be able to perform this dance. Rabam Jawa’s dancers were trained through the musical stimulation of Yakwa and *Busensok* songs. Ratchana said when she learned this dance, the dancers were required to memorize the rhythm of the song in the humming of “noi noi noi..” thus, the dancers marked the movements not indicating the tempo by counting 1-8 (one to eight) but to start, end, and provide accentuation marked is conducted by the music. The performance of Rabam Jawa is presented as a freestanding dance piece as well as in the drama section of Inao and Bussaba. Rabam Jawa is one case of the presence of Javanese culture in Thai style. According to the performance at the National Theater Thailand on May 29, 2016, the full duration of this dance is 6 minutes 27 seconds. From our point of view, it has 3 parts these are opening, main dance, and closing. However, it has 2 two main songs. The first song is from the opening to the main dance, and then ends with another song. One movement motif is accompanied by one song motif. The motif is repeated 4 to 6 times until the song ends. The genesis of Rabam Jawa is intricately intertwined with the historical context of Luang Pradit Pairroh’s expedition to Java in 1908. Luang Pradit was a Royal Thai Musician who visited Java with Prince Bhanurangsi Savawongse’s entourage. Luang Pradit, aged 27 at the time, created songs drawing on Javanese musical rhythms. The memory of Javanese rhythms was then imitated and created into several songs titled with the names of cities in Java. The following represents an exemplification of *Busensok*’s song notation, Fig. 2, derived from the transcript of the music melody that has been sourced from the Siammelodies YouTube channel and entitled Rabam Jawa: The Javanese Dance Performance, presented by The Music Office of the Department of Fine Arts at the National Theater [20].

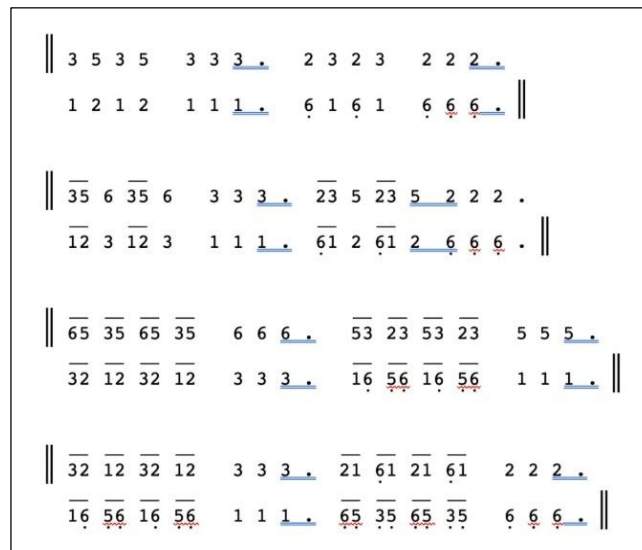


Fig 2. Notation of the *Busensok* Song, Western notation transcription by Ribeth Nurvijayanto

An examination of the notation text reveals that the melody of the song *Busensok* is comprised of five distinct melodic motifs. The composition under scrutiny comprises a primary melody that undergoes development through the incorporation of four distinct motifs. The development employs either the filler technique or the addition of tones as melodic variations. In relation to the scales employed in *Busensok* and *Yawa Mai*, Luang Pradit is responsible for the composition of Thai songs and music, utilising the concept of gamelan to be performed with Thai Angklung. Luang Pradit places particular emphasis on Javanese accents within the context of the heptatonic tone system. The Thai heptatonic tone scale is an equidistant seven system, yet traditional Thai music is based on the pentatonic scale, which has five primary tones. As posited by Surasak [21], the piece is composed of two secondary tones, with scale levels of 4 and 7. The *Busensok* and *Yawa Mai* songs in Rabam Jawa accompaniment utilise scales that are predominantly composed of pitches 1 (*do*), 2 (*re*), 3 (*mi*), 5 (*sol*), and 6 (*la*). The scale under consideration here is reminiscent of the Javanese scale system, *slendro*. The *Slendro* scale is a tuning system in Javanese gamelan that utilizes five principal tones within a single octave, namely 1 (*ji*), 2 (*ro*), 3 (*lu*), 5 (*ma*), and 6 (*nem*). The tonal distances between these notes are comparable. *Slendro* is a pentatonic scale that is characterised by an even division of intervals. However, in practice, each gamelan instrument exhibits variations in pitch due to the absence of a standardised method for determining gamelan tones [22]. The *slendro* tuning is historically the oldest tuning in Southeast Asia and has similarities to pentatonic scales found in many Asian cultures, such as China and India. The etymology of the term “*slendro*” is most likely associated with the Sailendra Dynasty, which exercised sovereignty over Java during the 8th-9th centuries AD. During its development, the *slendro* tuning spread and adapted in various parts of the archipelago, such as Java, Sunda, and Bali [23].

It is evident that Rabam Jawa's musical accompaniment is currently reliant upon the utilisation of the Pi Phat ensemble. Rachman's research on the comparison of Ranat and Gambang instruments, drawing on several sources, asserts that the Pi Phat ensemble comprises Ranat Ek, Ranat Ek Tum, Khong Wong Lek, Khong Wong Yai, Taphon, Glong Thad, Krui Piang Oa, Rak Khang, Kim, and Ching instruments [24]. The Rabam Jawa dance accompaniment does not adhere to the rules that govern the accompaniment of traditional Javanese music. In Javanese classical dance, the role of a protruding instrument, such as *kendang* or drum, is considered in terms of *pamurba irama*, or the leader of rhythm and regulating dynamics. The utilisation of the drum as an accompaniment to dance movement, signifying transition or the accompaniment of movement motifs, has been a hallmark of traditional dance practices [25]. The composition entitled “*Busensok*” and “*Yawa Mai*” in Rabam Jawa accompaniment has been observed to place a particular emphasis on the melodic aspect of the Ranat (xylophone) and Krui (flute). It is evident that the percussion playing of the Taphon and Glong Thad instruments is characterized

by a certain monotony. The historical research and musical text analysis of Rabam Jawa accompaniment music indicate that the accompaniment music was present prior to the creation of Rabam Jawa. Initially, the compositions of Luang Pradit were performed using angklung, accompanied by Rabam Jawa. In contemporary times, the traditional Thai instrument known as the angklung is being superseded by a more authentic representation of Thai culture. Luang Pradit's creative output in the domain of songwriting is characterised by an incorporation of Javanese musical elements, encompassing both instrumentation and scales. Luang Pradit's creative process is not merely imitation, but rather a process of recreation involving adjustment to the existing scale system and aesthetic conventions. Surasak [3] posits that Thai musical aesthetics are inextricably linked to Buddhist principles, which emphasise harmony, balance, and peace. The incorporation of Javanese elements into Thai traditional music and dance, particularly Rabam Jawa, has been instrumental in shaping the nation's artistic identity. This integration process involves a multifaceted interplay of creativity, musical negotiation, and cultural exchange, contributing to the rich tapestry of the Thai Cultural identity.

Both tangible and intangible musical elements undergo phasor displacement. The incorporation of tangible musical elements, including angklung and gamelan instruments, is a distinctive feature of the musical composition. Intangible musical elements include the concept of musical arrangement. These concepts include *cengkok*, *wiledan*, patterns, techniques, rules, ethics, norms, and so on [26]. The transfer process has been shown to affect change in meaning, function, and form when adapted to local Thai art practices [27]. The musical accompaniment in Rabam Jawa now employs the Pi Phat ensemble, with musical rules that adjust to the musical characteristics of Thai Tradition. This process demonstrates that physical displacement is not merely a transfer of form; rather, it gives rise to a new identity that is shaped by cross-cultural encounters and adaptations. The textual aspects sign [28] a shift both geographically and socio-culturally. As stated by Svasek [29]:

Mobility or 'transit' (see below) is a term used to describe the different processes at play when people and things cross geographical, social, and cultural boundaries as they move through time and space.

In addition to geographical migration, Rabam Jawa also experienced social and cultural migration. Java and Thailand are similar but different in form. The conditions of their society and culture are different. As revealed by Ahimsa-Putra [30], creative processes in symbolizing ideas and feelings in various forms of art cannot be separated from the social and cultural context in which the individual artist is located and raised. Thai people understand that the dance was inspired by Javanese culture, which can also be seen from the name of the dance, which retains Javanese names or is often referred to as Yakwa/Chawa (ยักวาชวา). The sound shift certainly occurs because it follows the customs and pronunciation adapted to the mother tongue, Thai. The image of Javanese culture is present in Rabam Jawa. Visually, it looks like Javanese dance, but there are adjustments in terms of clothing and movement vocabulary, so that the aesthetics that are present are Thai dance aesthetics. The resonance of Thai aesthetics in the visualization of cultural elements is unique. Thai people interpret an element from outside their own culture, and then express it following the social provisions and local wisdom. The process of importing Javanese culture to Thailand has started since Inao. The event of the phenomenon of Javanese cultural migration to Thailand presents an interpretation of the absorbed value, which is then called transit by Svasek. Svasek shows the next stage, namely, transition:

By contrast, changes that occur in the perceived value or meaning of the object, namely the crucifix, and the process by which this happens, are referred to as its 'transition'. Transition identifies transit-related changes in the meaning, value, and emotional efficacy of objects and images as opposed to changes in their location or ownership.

The values, meaning of ideas, and background contained in Javanese dance, in this case, the Yogyakarta and Surakarta styles, are not included in Rabam Jawa. In terms of the process of creating Rabam Jawa, the choreographer refers to photo documentation of Javanese dance. The choreographer looked at the dance poses in the photos taken by King Chulalongkorn during his

visit to Yogyakarta and Surakarta. In this case, it can be seen that the choreographer acted based on the bodily experience and aesthetic provision of Thai dance. The process shows the existence of cultural appropriation. Appropriation has multiple intersections and interrelationships.

..appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain
[31]

This appropriation can be seen in the costumes and vocabulary of dance movements. The costumes worn in Rabam Jawa consist of *jamang* or *irah-irah* (headpiece), *sumping* (ear accessories), *kelat bahu* (shoulder accessories), *kemben* (bodice), *sampur* (scarf), and *jarik* (fabric), Fig. 3.

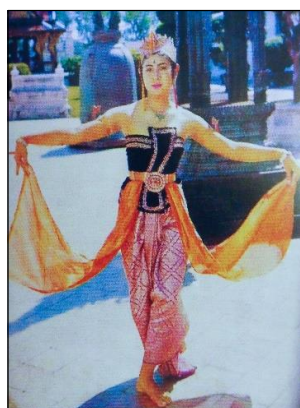


Fig 3. Rabam Jawa in 1954

That figure is the first generation of Javanese Rabam shown. Appropriation can be seen visually from the clothing worn. The clothing, at first glance, looks like Yogyakarta or Surakarta dance costumes, but when we look at the fabric patterns and jewelry ornaments used are Thai patterns. Rabam Jawa's fashion is dynamic, and some creative development is done. At the time of the interview, Ratchana revealed that the *jamang* she used, as in the picture above, was the one commonly used, made of paper material and dyed. All Rabam Jawa dancers wear the same clothes and are danced by women, as is the case with Bedaya and Serimpi dances in Yogyakarta and Surakarta styles. Over time, from the Ratchana era to 2016, the *jamang* changed into *irah-irahan* gelang like in *wayang wong*, but there are also *irah-irahan* like *Sekartaji* with longer ear accessories than those in Java. Nowadays, the Rabam Jawa is danced by both men and women. From being made of paper, it has now changed to metal in the ornamental part, while in Java (Surakarta and Yogyakarta), it is more common in leather (Fig. 4). The shape is similar, but the size is slightly larger. The ornaments on the metal, both *irah-irahan* and jewelry, are in Thai style.



Fig 4. Rabam Jawa in 2017

The *irah-irahan gelang* worn by the dancer shows appropriation, because in Yogyakarta and Surakarta it is used for male characters, while in Rabam Jawa it is used for female characters. Rabam Jawa's costumes are also similar to Panji costumes, but more inclined towards Surakarta-style costumes. Panji in Java is closely related to *irah-irahan tekes*, which is shaped

like a *gelung*, then uses *sumping*, *kemben*, *chiffon sampur*, and *samparan* slope cloth. The Javanese Rabam uses a similar outfit of *irah-irahan gelung* and *sumping*, *kemben*, plain chiffon scarf, and *jarik samparan* (fabric). Thai does not put a special name on the details of each outfit, but it is directly mentioned as a Rabam Jawa outfit. Rabam Jawa has various versions of clothing developed based on Javanese clothing. The differentiation is in the color and the way it is worn. The *irah-irahan* in Rabam Jawa uses the men's *irah-irahan* as in Klana, but the back is enlarged. The *irah-irahan* is made of metal, not leather, which was commonly used in Java at this time. For Javanese people, seeing this outfit visually identifies it as what they would normally see in Javanese dance. This act detaches the costume element from its original gendered and narrative context, repurposing it as an aesthetic marker of “the other”. For Thai audiences, this costume associated the familiarity with Inao, not the intricacies of Javanese court symbolism. The movement vocabulary found in Rabam Jawa is also identified as having similarities with Javanese. Some of the movements that appear in Rabam Jawa, such as *kengser*, *trisik*, *ngruji*, *ukel*, *ngithing*, *pacak gulu jiling*, also *dolan* *sampur*. The motion vocabulary in Thai dance also has a similar attitude to *ngruji* and *ngithing*. *Ngruji* is the same as *Tang wong* (ตั่งวง) in Thailand, while *Ngithing* is like *Lao Keaw* (ล่อแก้ว), and *Nyempurit* is similar to *Ceep* (ฉีป). Appropriation is added to the attitude of worship, for example, both in Yogyakarta and Surakarta, female dancers will not raise their arms until they are almost parallel to their shoulders when worshipping, but in Rabam Jawa, the attitude of worship is done as in *gagahan* dance.

While movements identifiable with Javanese dance are present, they are performed through a Thai kinesthetic filter. The transformation starts with foundational elements of posture and expression. In the Yogyakarta dance style, the torso is upright. In the Surakarta style, the torso leans slightly forward (*mayuk*). In Rabam Jawa, the body position is upright, with the upper torso leaning back slightly. It projected Thai classical dance posture. Furthermore, the expression both in Yogyakarta and Surakarta female dance is typically introverted, a serene smile that hides the teeth with the gaze directed downwards at a specific angle (approximately three times the height of the dancer). In contrast, Rabam Jawa tends to have a more cheerful expression, and the eyes actively scan the space, sometimes with a glance. The grounding of fluid quality (*banyu mili*—flow movement technique in Yogyakarta court dance) is replaced by the verticality, control, precision, and frontal presentation of Thai court dance. Dancers maintain the Thai postural stability during the dance [32]. The vertical orientation [33] is consistently maintained, even in head movements; when the head turns left or right (*pacak gulu*), the chin remains slightly lifted, creating a sense of noble aloofness that contrasts with the more introspective Javanese focus. This recodification is also evident in the details of hand gestures. For instance, the Javanese gesture *ngithing* (where the thumb and middle finger form a circle, the other fingers are gently curled), while in Thai *lao keaw*, the thumb and middle finger also form a circle, but the remaining fingers are held taut and straight. Thus, the Javanese dance vocabulary is adopted, the underlying “grammatical movement”—the principles of bodily alignment, energy, and gestural quality—is entirely and unapologetically Thai dance. In order to explain the process of aesthetic domestication more systematically, Table 1 illustrates how Javanese aesthetic elements were transformed in Rabam Jawa.

As the Table 1, the transformation shows across the aesthetic domains. In each case, the external form of Javanese culture is selectively retained, while the internal substance, logical structure, and cultural meaning are systematically replaced with Thai principles. This is not a simple borrowing but a constructed process of re-interpretation, where the foreign culture is tamed, reshaped, and made legible within the aesthetic and ideological framework of the Thai court. This entire process aligns with Maruska Svasek’s theoretical framework. As revealed by Svasek, the transit of Javanese culture occurred through dance, photograph, and song as the product of the Thai King’s visit. The profound transition occurred when the meaning and value of these cultural forms were altered. Javanese idioms are present in Rabam Jawa, but this does not bring the dance to a Javanese sense of movement; instead, a strong sense of Thai movement emerges. The final transformation refers to transit-related changes in human subjects, specifically in terms of their status, identity formation, and emotional subjectivity. Rabam Jawa is a finished product as a result of hybrid creation, a Thai performance about an imagined Java which projected sovereignty of the court.

Tabel 1. Elements of Javanese aesthetics transformed into Rabam Jawa.

Aesthetic Elements	Javanese Elements	Transformation in Rabam Jawa	Analysis (aesthetic domestication process)
Music	The Sundanese angklung is often played melodically as an ensemble. It has two bamboo tubes with a diatonic or pentatonic scale. The <i>kendang</i> (drum) serves as <i>pamurba irama</i> (leader of rhythm), controlling tempo and dynamics, and directly interacting with the dancer's movement.	The Thai Angklung has three bamboo tubes with a chromatic 7-tone Thai scale. It used to play the composition Yawa Mai & <i>Busensok</i> . It selectively uses pitches that evoke slendro song. Rabam Jawa: Yawa Mai and <i>Busensok</i> use the Pi Phat ensemble. The percussion plays a steady with monotonous beat. The melodic instruments (Ranat, Krui) lead the composition.	Musical grammar (tuning, scale, ensemble function) follows the Thai system. Bamboo sound to make a Javanese ambience. The rhythmic leadership shifts to a melody-led structure (Thai court music characteristic). The drum's function is domesticated.
Costume	Headpiece (<i>irah-irahan</i>), Bodice, jarik (fabric), and accessories with distinct gender and character symbolism	Recodified symbols: Cultural symbols in batik are replaced with Thai motifs, it worn with the <i>samparan</i> model. The Irah-irahan (headline) is reworded. Male Javanese headdresses worn by a female Thai dancer	Visual signifier of "Javaneseness" with a mix of tribal culture. The meaning is not inherent but is assigned by the new role of Thai dance as a visual signifier; it is primarily associated with the Inao/Panji.
Movement	Javanese dance: Grounded posture and sense (e.g., <i>mendhak</i>), fluid (<i>mbanyu mili</i>), small movement volume for female dancer, and introspective focus.	Thai dance emphasizes verticality, a lifted chin, mixed female and male gestures, and Thai hand gestures which have similarities in Java (e.g., <i>ngithing</i> [Java] & <i>lao keaw</i> [Thai])	Javanese vocabulary (<i>kengser</i> , <i>encot</i> , <i>trisik</i> , <i>ngruji</i> , <i>ngithing</i>) is referenced, but the underlying aesthetic is entirely Thai. The goal is not to achieve Javanese feeling (<i>rasa</i>) but to display in Thai.

4. Conclusion

Javanese elements (music, costume, and movement) vocabulary was performed in Thai dance, named Rabam Jawa. The movement vocabulary was executed in Thai dance grammatically. It is replacing the Javanese grounded and fluid ethos with verticality, precision, and presentational quality of Thai classical dance. This process is understood through the theoretical lens of cultural transit (Svasek) and appropriation (Sanders). This study demonstrates that Rabam Jawa is not merely imitating Java, but a product of aesthetic domestication. The research traced the creation from fragmented resources (King Rama V's visit memory, a photograph of Javanese dancers, and the sound of angklung), showing that Rabam Jawa not only builds intercultural dialogue, but also projects artistic sovereignty of the court. This research revealed a systematic process of transformation. Empirically, it gives an analysis of Rabam Jawa that contributes to Southeast Asian studies. Methodologically, a collaborative approach and a cross-cultural approach offer a model to analyze intra-Asia cultural exchange. Theoretically, this research contributes to global discourse about cultural appropriation, specifically a non-colonial approach: Javanese instrument retuning and reform to Thai music, decontextualized costumes and re-coded with Thai elements, Javanese dance vocabulary was performed with Thai classical dance grammar. These findings offer several significant contributions. First, this study provides a grounded analysis of Rabam Jawa with the notions of appropriation culture. It stands as a testament to how culture absorbs, reinterprets, and explores foreign elements with its own aesthetic. For future research, it could further explore critical education focusing on cross-cultural and transformational understanding of what we perceive today.

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