

## Research Article

# A Study of the Elements of Muay Thai Dance Performance

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## Abstract

This article is part of the research on Thai boxing dancing: an analysis of the award-winning works of Thailand. The researcher studied the theoretical concepts used in the research. It consists of the concept of martial arts for self-defense in the genre of Muay Thai. Concepts of research regulations in the field of fine arts. Concepts of 8 elements of performing arts. Concepts of contemporary performing arts in order that use in data analysis and synthesis.

The study found that Regarding the martial art of Thai Muay Thai, there are 2 types of postures: 1) Main Boxing 2) Muay Keaw, there are 15 main postures, 15 lace postures and 64 boxing postures, using the body as a weapon, 9 of which are 2 fists, 2 feet, 2 knees, 2 elbows and 1 head.

Research in fine arts, there are specialized forms that can be divided into 4 main fields: visual arts, musical arts, dance, and performing arts. The format has a method and steps that are systematic and orderly in collecting and researching Information from which knowledge can be derived from facts and can be explained academically and supports the concept of research that meets the objectives and is compiled through the research methodological process.

Elements of performing arts, the elements of Muay Thai dance performances can be classified as follows: 1) the script 2) the actors 3) the performance of the dancing style or performing arts. 4) performance area 5) props 6) costumes 7) sound effects and 8) lighting. The form of Muay Thai dancing is a contemporary performing art with a variety of applied sciences, presented through the concept of all 8 elements of performing arts, with presentations through contemporary performing arts that combine vigorous fighting with Thai customs that are worth studying to lead to further development of other forms of art and culture.

**Keywords:** Research in Fine Arts, Elements of Muay Thai Dancing, Muay Thai

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## Introduction

Arts and culture in the multicultural context of Thai society nowadays appear in many forms or inherent in traditions. It can be said that in the dimensional diversity of society that has different characteristics but still appears to be a common characteristic of the relationship of the same things or works of art, it can be seen in works of art (Wongyannawa, 2012). Culture that people generally perceive can be classified into two types: concrete culture is tangible objects, such as art objects, architecture or buildings that reflect history, and abstract culture is non-material things such as music, rituals, traditions. Local traditions and ways of life that cannot be captured as objects but have overlapping stories that are cultural traditions are nested within that way (Sunphongsri, 2016) together with arts and culture in the fields of science. Thai performing arts, such as Khon, drama, dance, express emotions, feelings, and stories with the performer being the medium through sound and body such as singing, playing music, dancing, Thai dancing, showing gestures (Saithongkham, 2018), has been passed down and learned from generation to generation until the present. Another dimension is the art and cultural work of rituals and festivals. These create the life structure of communities and groups. It also plays an important role in promoting social structures by assembling them together, which gives rise to identity and inheritance from the past. Strengthening communities that transcend conflicts and differences whether it be gender, skin color, class, and ethnicity, people of different origins. Therefore, it may be an important factor in creating the intangible heritage by cultural capital allowing society to inherit and participate in the specific expression of the intangible heritage as well.

Muay Thai, Thai martial arts, one of the cultural capitals that have been inherited for a long time, the time before the Ayutthaya period and there is evidence of historical inscriptions in the Lanna language called Thai Yuan by recording a copy in the palm called "Mangrai Science" has recorded a provision about the word "Muay" as evidence for the first time (Kantamara, 2010). Thai martial arts or Muay Thai is also a weapon of Thai people called bare-handed martial arts. Using the body's body as a weapon, it is called Nava-weapon or nine weapons, namely two fists, two feet, two knees, two elbows, and one head. It is a Thai martial art that is a valuable heritage of Thai wisdom. In other words, it also helps with physical and mental strength, making the trainees more focused and intelligent and looking at the opponent's tactics, including the underlying mental stability, being able to control one's mind and having an aesthetics hidden in the aspect of delicacy and beauty because the part of the Muay Thai dance, also known as Wai Khru Muay, expresses the unique characteristics of Muay Thai or the style of boxing techniques. Sometimes the Wai Khru Muay Thai ceremony can be known as the boxing school, which is also known as the Muay Thai way, in terms of the physical aspect of warming up the body to be ready to fight or compete. Muay Thai is considered a unique form that is not transmitted or recorded in textbooks but to learn from specific sages. In addition, the art of Muay Thai is still being pushed by those involved to become a world heritage site, which is considered something to be proud of Thai art and culture. It is a culture that clearly reflects Thainess.

Thai boxing dance, a contemporary performing art created from the development of Muay Thai sport, established in 2009, and a multicultural dimension phenomenon. Integration of Thai self-defense fighting, combining the science of performing arts used in the form of presentations. The change in the sport of Muay Thai is an important tool or mechanism that makes Thai youths who are interested or tourists who are beginning to be interested in boxing or who are originally interested in the aesthetics of watching the joint work of various fields of science. There is also a revival of local martial arts and local boxing. The performance style is also hidden in many fields of Thai art including Thai dance, Thai literature, Thai history, visual arts, identity, local wisdom, tradition, and culture presented through that form of performance that the audience during that era accepted it because it was easy to understand the content, not too complicated, which was mixed together in each set of that performance (Boonpeng, 2013) and was interesting because The freedom of the creator to design unlimited styles. It can be considered that Muay Thai dance performances are a "change of culture" because all forms of performances bring trait, identity, art that the original culture is important to preserve and create empirical works.

From the background and importance of the above problems, therefore, the researcher has an idea to study and analyze Muay Thai dance performances from the winning works of Thailand by studying elements of performances that are complete and beautiful and may lead to cultural reproduction processes in terms of conservation and development simultaneously for the benefit of arts and culture circles. The integration of

performance arts and the use of cultural capital in Thai martial arts. “Muay Thai” is included as an educational guide for those who are interested in arts and culture, and contemporary Thai art in the future.

### Objective

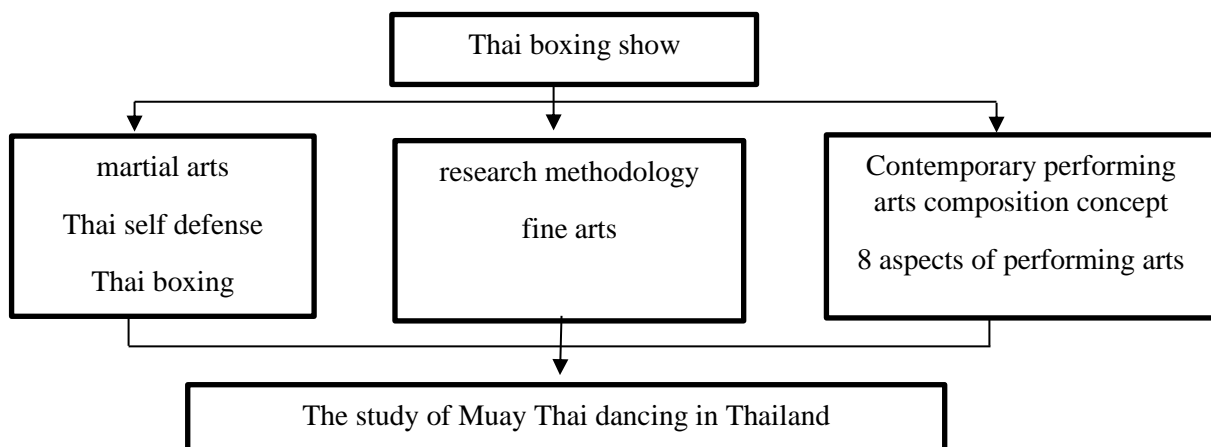
To study concepts used to analyze elements of Muay Thai dance performances, contemporary performing arts from award-winning works of Thailand in conducting research at the doctoral level in arts and culture curriculum.

### Research Method

This study used qualitative research methods combined with fine arts research methods. Using the research format:-

1. Study from relevant documents, including research, textbooks, books, academic articles. video media
2. Interview, which is a method of collecting evidence using personal communication. with the aim of receiving information that meets the objectives. Information providers are divided into 2 groups:-
  - 2.1 People involved in producing Muay Thai dance competitions.
  - 2.2 Academics with knowledge of performing arts at the higher education level.
3. Observation model uses a process format for observing the Muay Thai dance activities.

### Education conceptual framework



**Figure 1** Conceptual framework for conducting an analytical study of Muay Thai dancing performances in Thailand.  
source: author, 2022

In this research study, the researcher has studied the data related concepts for conducting an analytical study of Muay Thai dance performances in Thailand from documents and academic research (Buasan, 2015) by studying the concepts and theories used in the study, including Thai martial arts, Muay Thai, research concepts in fine arts and contemporary performing arts. The concept of 8 elements of performing arts has the results of the study as follows:-

### The concept of martial arts for self-defense in Muay Thai style

Muay Thai is a boxing sport on the stage, also known as the boxing ring. The rules allow opponents to punch using hands, feet, elbows and knees. Muay Thai is therefore a science and an art because it is an academic subject that everyone can learn like other subjects and is a body of knowledge full of patterned strategies that are difficult to learn and practice expertly (Suhongsa, 2002) Muay Thai is both a fighting method, a sports movement activity, and is considered a unique self-defense strategy. Muay Thai is the national art and identity of the Thai nation by ancient Muay Thai textbooks. It was the first textbook to be discovered and was written during the reign of King Rama III, describing the basic principles of Muay Thai, namely throwing, tapping, grabbing and breaking.

The style of Muay Thai can be divided into 2 styles: 1) Muay Lak, which is boxing that fights tightly, calmly and carefully, with stable and conscious control of boxing postures, and 2) Muay Kiew, a form of boxing that has methods of fighting in dazzling tactic, moves around, never stops, agile, deceptive and able to dodge well. The characteristics of the principles of Muay Thai practice are 2 main postures, namely 15 major boxing postures and 15 minor postures, with the art of using the body as a weapon, namely kicks, knees, elbows and fists. In addition to the practice of the main posture, Muay Thai has different styles of boxing tricks, such as the art of attacking the opponent, the art of receiving the opponent, and the art of boxing to solve the opponent's weapons, such as 14 boxing techniques by the feet, 3 boxing techniques by the knees, 25 boxing techniques by fists, 3 boxing techniques by elbow guard, and 19 attack boxing tricks.

In conclusion, it can be said that a Thai martial art called Muay Thai, is one of the ancient forms of fighting that uses the body as a weapon to show off in combat. It is considered one of the wisdom of Thai ancestors in using the body to protect themselves from dangers. It is one of the cultural capitals that should be preserved and developed further.

### **Concepts and methodologies in fine arts research**

Fine Arts research methodology is the science of creating art in a variety of styles. Dramatic works is one form of creativity in this field and can be adjusted according to the currents of time or according to national policies (Sensai, 2019). Fine arts are created from the beauty and needs of the artist or the person who created the work. It is also a tool to record events or moments of that artwork as another form.

Research in fine arts consists of 4 main fields: 1. Visual arts 2. Music arts 3. Dramatic arts and 4. Performing arts. It consists of 2 parts: academic and aesthetic (Metanee, 2022). The content of the art science is unique and has a unique style. There are a variety of works of art that have specific characteristics which are the charm of the work. There are no clear requirements depending on the creativity of the owner of the work. Creative works of art may require academic principles that have more or less weight depending on the nature of the work obtained from the process of thinking, planning, analyzing, synthesizing, and critiquing that can be explained according to the research methodology.

Research in the fine arts can be written in the form of the same objectives as research in other disciplines, namely seeking knowledge by applying or integrating knowledge in the fine arts which can be used according to the objectives, such as benefits for education, creativity for application of knowledge from research methodologies, conservation and development. The types of research work in art and science can be divided into main types as follows: 1. Historical approach 2. Conceptual study 3. Concept of study of impact or achievement 4. The concept of the study of the process of artistic creation. 5. Evaluation educational concept 6. Comparative study guidelines 7. Guidelines for studying interdisciplinary relations or multidisciplinary studies 8. The concept of the study of evolutionary change 9. Study concepts about identity and 10. Study guidelines about history and works. By means of the study, data can be collected from documents, field visits, interviews, quantitative research, numerical statistics, experimental research and creative research and sculpture design. There are steps according to the research methodology, which in general are research planning, conducting research and the process of research dissemination.

It can be concluded that research in the fine arts is a research model with a systematic approach to knowledge education, facts, and to be explained academically by researchers. Fine arts scholars must study ideas according to the objectives of the research by writing and compiling through the research process. In addition, the research methodology can be adjusted more than any other form, or it is the application of that research book for the benefit of future artistic research.

### **Performance art concept**

Performing Arts, that means performing arts related which is either traditional or applied, including drama, music and folk performances. There is also a definition of the word performing arts in many forms, such as Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, to define the word performing arts as an imitation of nature. It is one of the communications between human beings by using words to convey ideas and the art of expressing emotions. The art of letting go of one's personality and bringing the character's personality and feelings to wear and make the wear look real for the audience. So, acting is like conveying the feelings and thoughts of the characters. The actor has to wear that personality alive and must feel in the acting role. If the show is just

a spoof and just looks real, the audience will notice those flaws. Performers have the duty to control their bodies, minds, voices, emotions with consciousness and feel sincere in what they do. In addition, the performer must memorize the lines, words, and must study the character's personality by leaving the personality of himself all the time wearing the role to blend in with the performances of other characters. The performance is similar to "Pretend play" which is a pleasure that all of us humans have played since childhood. Experiences like this are a part of almost all human lives in our attempt to escape from ourselves to others and to live in new fantasies. We try to pretend to think of others while having a perfectly normal consciousness. Performing arts are the creative products of performers and discover what follows in art is thoughts, attitudes. These works of art have amazing influence, being able to change the behavior of the viewer, the user of these works of art, and oftentimes, works of art can also create good and bad consciousness.

It can be concluded that performing arts is like a tool that human beings use as an intermediary to connect their emotions, feelings, and thoughts in order to convey to other people to understand and recognize what they want to express. Acting is an art of communicating with concrete images. Which the audience can easily recognize and understand without the hassle of interpretation. As for the emotions, even in the form of abstraction, it's true, but general audiences can feel directly from the performers.

### **Contemporary performing arts**

Contemporary performing arts, is a term used in the modern era to refer to what is presented in the present day. Although it is an existing old style item, the word "contemporary" is a combination between two periods, namely 2 things, depending on the style, technique, concept and presentation of the artist who creates each work with no clearly defined pattern. But if it is a combination of old and new techniques, you must look at the weight or percentage in the presentation. There are 2 guidelines for creating Thai contemporary works (Pinijsarn, 2016) as follows: 1. Artists must have freedom in creating works because the creation of work is independent from everything. 2. The audience or viewers must not be lost in the issues presented by the creator.

In conclusion, contemporary performing art is a combination of performing arts that expresses Thainess and the existing universality, presenting through the technique of the creator of the work, which may be related to aesthetics, beauty, and nature as human beings are bound by nature. The media or performances of contemporary works or performances still use principles to combine with nature imitations.

### **Concept of 8 elements of performing arts**

Performing arts have important elements that are the main lines used to design performances, consisting of 8 principles (Kulphisarn, 2020), which can be described in detail as follows:-

1. Elements of the script: Script design plays an important part and is the starting point for the creation of works of performing arts. The script also includes the main concept of performance design, because the show must have a message to be the main seizure of the creator of the director or the designer to make all the work consistent and may be the action of that expression.

2. Composition of performers: The casting actors are one of the most important elements of the components because of the creation of the design of the performing arts. An actor is a person who conveys the "message" from the creation of the work which want to present to the audience. So, the actors are very important, which must be considered based on suitability for the given role. The ability to convey and share experiences, versatility in work and relationship with other actors.

3. Performance elements: Is the design of a dance or performing arts in which this element is considered another important principle that results in a complete expression in all dimensions. Designing for style, dance, posture, every movement comes out with meaning. The emotions are conveyed through the eyes, the body, and may include conversations that may be linked. Collaboration between performers and audience.

4. Components of the performance area: In the show, the design of the set and the place in the performance are two of the important elements that the creator should consider in designing the performance, show scene design. It should come from the interpretation problem that needs to be communicated about that type of performance. The concept of symbols may be used to help with the design and incorporated into the design. It can also help to help make the show more dimensional. As for the space used for the performance, consideration should be given to the appropriateness of the use of the space in creating the performance to suit the performance format, the number of performers, and the type of performance as well.

5. Device components: The design of props for some types of performances. Equipment is an important factor in the design of the performance as it helps to promote the performance more understandably or in other words have a duty to communicate between performances with audiences in a semantic way.

6. Elements of dressing: The designing of costumes for performances is one of the important elements where the creator of the work must take into account the role of the character who shows the movement of the body and the design of the dance style. In addition, the concept of visual arts can be used to help promote the design, such as the selection of color schemes or materials to create costumes.

7. The sound component of the show: All types of performances are required to have sound accompaniment. Especially in the dance genre, it is very important to use musical instruments to accompany the performance. Therefore, it is essential to design according to the lyrics of the song. At the same time, music is the main element that helps complete the performance and can convey the meaning more clearly. It also helps to create a more realistic atmosphere in the performance. In a type of performance that does not use background music, it depends on the purpose of the creator of the work.

8. Lighting elements: Stage lighting design should take into account many factors, starting from the position on the performance stage to the props. The equipment for designing the lighting system should work in harmony with each other while the stage is doing activities in order to create a beautiful lighting environment that meets the purpose and style of that performance.

### **Contemporary performing arts Muay Thai dance performance**

The art of performing Muay Thai dance is a new creative performance started in 2009 under the Rak Chat Rak Muay Thai project. Muay Thai dancing is a form of performance and a driven contest activity with the objective of campaigning to solve negative problems among Thai youth under sacrifice policy for Thai society. The initiator of the Muay Thai dancing project and the idea to expand the Thai martial arts or Muay Thai to become more popular among Thai youths by bringing the concept of Thai fighting style is presented through creation, which is designed according to the principles of performing arts in all 8 aspects (Tanprasert,2020 ) and defines the terminology of this type of contemporary performing arts called “Muay Thai dance” or “Thai boxing dance”. From interviews with the operator team, the creation of Muay Thai dance, Khun Nopparat Phuttharatmanee chairman of Muay Thai dance event organizing, described the style of Muay Thai dance that

“Muay Thai dance is dancing arts mixed with Muay Thai dance, here is a word that means the science of acting because the performance has elements and has a story, a music which has the meaning of performance. But all the shows presented about Muay Thai, which are Muay Thai style weapons fights, with Wai Khru, fists, knees, elbows, major and minor boxing postures, so it is a synonym for Muay Thai dance.”

Mr. Antoine Pinto professional boxer, host and judging panel for Muay Thai dance events, described the style of Muay Thai dancing as follows:

“Muay Thai dance is a combination of performance and Thai boxing or Muay Thai with music, a style of Muay Thai with the style of showing the art of Muay Thai with fun style, enjoy watching, and also have a story.”

The form of Muay Thai dancing is a rhythmic expression. The gestures are presented through the elements of performing arts completely until it becomes a work of art that makes the viewers of this field create an aesthetic perception. In this regard, there are still hidden signs in this type of performance as well. The main elements of the performance, besides being designed according to the principles of performing arts in all 8 areas, Muay Thai dancing arts also have specific characteristics that the study has collected since 2010 that can be analyzed as the unique characteristics of creation, which are the main components and minor components.

### **The main elements of the Thai boxing dance performance**

1. Wai Khru Muay Thai is a compulsory form, regarded as respect for teachers by the process of paying homage to teachers. In the show, there is no predetermining of what position to start and end with, but the most popular form of Muay Thai dancing is starting with the sitting posture, whip the fried face powder and continue with other Muay Thai Wai Khru poses freely.

2. The basic postures of Muay Thai are 4 postures, including fists, feet, knees, elbows, which are clearly not specified in the performance. Basic Muay Thai stance must start with first, which the designer can invent and apply the weapon posture freely but must practice the posture to be complete and clear.

3. Tha Mae Mai (major boxing postures), Luk Mai Muay Thai (minor boxing postures), are the second most important things of Muay Thai dancing. Because of Thai boxing or Muay Thai dance performance, not only the main postures of Wai Khru and fists, feet, knees and elbows, but the major and minor boxing postures are also important postures. The designer must create a performance using the major and minor postures beautifully displayed.

4. Creative boxing posture, the creative boxing posture in Muay Thai dance competitions, are the adaptations of boxing postures to create more creative weapons. For example, from the original posture of releasing any actions in Muay Thai, for example, straight punching before action, there may be a backflip and then punching, or connecting and going out to make gestures on the mezzanine, etc.



**Figure 2** Creative boxing moves  
source: author, 2022

5. Strength in performing postures, Muay Thai dancers or successful teams besides the new boxing postures. Another important thing is strength in performing strong Muay Thai postures, clear in the deployment of action and the execution of the perfect stance.



**Figure 3** Strength in performing Muay Thai dancing poses  
source: Meesomsak, 2022

### Secondary component showing Thai boxing dance

1. Muay Thai equipment in the dance: Another important element is the costumes. The costumes of Muay Thai dancing are similar to Muay Thai, which the performers must wear. They are:- 1. MongkonSisa (a garland on head), 2. Prachied (an inscribed cloth on arms), 3. Hand wraps, which are considered compulsory equipment. But in the show, the form of hand wrapping has been modified to be a sleeve. The shirt will look like a sleeveless shirt with a stand-up collar and a cut in the front, short torso (cropped waist), and Oloincloth or pants There is a pattern sewn into the pants, but the loincloth is concise in order to facilitate the movement of the show because it requires fast movements. If the design is too tight, it may cause the costume to tear during the performance. There is a cloth tied at the waist by the Muay Thai dancing costume in addition to the above mentioned. The waist tie is another item in an outfit that can be tied in many ways according to the design of that dress. It was found to tie a single piece of fabric and two pairs of pieces to create contrasting colors, such as black and red, white and black, gold and red to complete the outfit.



**Figure 4** Thai boxing dance costumes  
source: author, 2022



**Figure 5** Muay Thai dance performance in Thailand  
source: author, 2022

2. Music: In Muay Thai dance performances, music is of secondary importance to strong boxing postures and creative boxing postures. The characteristics of the music for the Muay Thai dancing show are using a song with an instrumental melody without lyrics. The accompaniment may be Thai music or international music. But if it is an international instrument, Thai instruments must be inserted as part of the song, such as the boxing bagpipe, drum, or perng-mang, to make the song sound Thai, which is popular with



the style of music that is fast, and fun in terms of fighting. In addition, folk music can be adapted to the notes, such as the use of dance melodies, convert notes or music for dramas and movies during battles, and by adding sound effects, such as lightning, thunder, animal sounds, or the sound of that character in order to make the fight furiously, provocative and to promote a more complete form of performance.

3. Presentation style. Throughout the 12 years of the creation of Muay Thai dances, the presentation format in each year has been creative and has a common characteristic, namely bringing local stories or Thai phrases to present, such as Phran Boon-Jap, Kinnaree or historical stories. For example, the legend of the battle of King Naresuan is presented as a form of presentation. In order to make the show look easy to understand, from 2011 onwards, it was found that the scene was used to accompany the performance and other equipment in addition to adding to the most complete form of Muay Thai dancing as well.



**Figure 6** Muay Thai dance performance in Thailand  
source: author, 2022

Muay Thai Dance is a modern performing art that has been adapted and developed from Thai martial arts. The body of knowledge of Muay Thai posture has been transferred and improved in an unlimited form and without limitation, presented through contemporary performances. It is another aspect of the show that combines Muay Thai culture with other arts perfectly.

## Conclusion

The complete art of performing Muay Thai dances should have 8 elements of performing arts, namely, having a performance script, having a clear form of performance concept that can be easily understood and not complicated and performers who have skillfully trained in Muay Thai dancing also conveying emotions, feelings, gestures, performances well and completely. In addition, the creator should also consider the design of the work, so the design of the setting for the performance should be interpreted from the topics that want to communicate that type of performance. Symbolic concepts could be used to help design the performance. The performance props is an important part of show design as it helps to enhance the performance to be more understandable, or in other words having a duty to communicate between the performance and audiences in a meaningful symbolic way. For a complete Muay Thai dancing costume, there must be all elements of Muay Thai, including the auspicious head, arm banding, and hand wrapping. Other costumes can be freely adapted for beauty but must not disturb or make the performance less enjoyable. In terms of lighting and sound, the design must be aligned with the conceptual performance style, if the creator can do these 8 elements completely, it will enhance the completeness of Muay Thai dancing performance.

This article is a part of the research on Muay Thai Dance: An analysis of award winning performances of Thailand by studying the concepts used in data analysis and the study model of the research. It is interesting that it is worth supporting and promoting in terms of information about Muay Thai as a sport that uses violence in expression, devoid of aesthetics for general audiences except those who watch sports. Performing arts are

the sciences of dancing, expression by body which creates pieces for the audience to see the beauty in things according to the designer who created the performing arts. “Muay Thai Dance” is one form of combining two sciences that are in different perspectives but can be created perfectly. It also continues to give full value in arts and culture. The direction of Muay Thai in today's era, including in the future, Thai martial arts style known as Muay Thai is progressing from those involved to becoming a world heritage site, which is considered to be the pride of Thai arts and culture.

Thai martial arts also play a role in enhancing knowledge, understanding and development as well as to create enjoyment. Muay Thai dance, one of the forms of performing arts developed from Thai boxing that has been merged with the changes in the modern world, is an important tool or mechanism that makes Thai youths interested in Muay Thai. The performance style is also hidden in the science of various Thai arts, including Thai dance, Thai literature, Thai history, visual arts, and local wisdom identities that are integrated into each of the performances, which is interesting because of the freedom of the creator to be able to design without limitation. This research is one that integrates the knowledge of various sciences in the analysis and synthesis of data both education in sports and performing arts. Perspectives of related scholars through the perspective of arts and culture by analyzing through research methodology in fine arts in order to lead to the further development of Thailand's academic and related sciences in the future.

### **Expected Benefits**

This research can be used as a guideline for the development of research in Fine Arts and other fields of research that require combined data analysis. Including a gathering of knowledge about Muay Thai dancing in Thailand, which is a contemporary performance adapted and developed from Muay Thai competition. Moreover, this could be considered as a public relations for Muay Thai dancing competitions broadly, as well as promoting activities for those who are interested to see the aesthetics in order to be able to apply in the field of Performing Arts and Sports and be useful in Thai arts and culture.

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