

THAI CLASSICAL DANCE

The Female Character

Tua Nang — the Aesthetics of Movement

AESTHETICS OF THAI DANCE MOVEMENT · PER 2714

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Four Roles, One Tradition

Thai classical dance-drama (*lakhon ram*) is built on four principal character types. Each carries its own codified vocabulary of movement. The **Nang** embodies the refined feminine ideal — the focus of this course.

Phra

The noble male — open, upright, a commanding line.

Nang

The noble female — contained, gentle, gracefully poised.

Yak

The ogre — powerful, weighted, forceful.

Ling

The monkey — agile, springy, quick.

Beauty Through Restraint

The aesthetic of the Nang is **grace** (*lila*) — gentleness, containment, and unhurried control. The body stays close to its own centre; limbs trace soft, rounded curves rather than reaching outward.

The frame settles into a gentle **S-curve**, weight poised and quiet. Nothing is rushed; nothing is displayed. Beauty arrives through discipline, not force.

Three qualities

Softness — rounded, close-held line

Poise — steady, centred weight

Restraint — measured, never hurried

Foundations of the Body

Before repertoire comes the *alphabet* of movement — the fixed positions from which every dance is composed.

Jeeb

The curled hand: thumb meeting index finger, the others fanned — a delicate, precise seal of the fingertips.

Tang Wong

The rounded, lifted arm. For the Nang it is held **lower and closer** to the body than for the Phra.

The Frame

Softly bent knees, drawn-in elbows, a lifted chest — a compact, elegant posture that keeps every line contained.

Dancing Tam Khanob

Tam khanob — "according to the canon." To dance *tam khanob* is to perform the form exactly as it has been handed down, teacher to student. Four elements must move as one.

Movement

Codified gesture *tha ram*
— the shapes of the
dance.

Rhythm

Tempo and pulse
changwa — timing of
every accent.

Music

The melody *phleng* that
the body answers.

Emotion

Inner feeling *arom* — the
character made visible.

How the Dances Are Named

The names of the pieces describe their character. Learn the roots and the repertoire becomes readable.

Ram Cha

The slow, lyrical dance — unhurried, it reveals pure grace and line.

Ram Rai

The flowing, travelling passage — continuous movement that carries the narrative.

Nai & Nok

"Inner" (refined court style) versus "outer" (livelier, freer) manners of the same form.

Pieces of the Female Canon

LYRICAL & TRAVELLING

Ram Cha Pi Nai · Ram Cha Pi Nok

Ram Rai Nai · Ram Rai Nok

Ram Rai Chatri

named for the *pi* (oboe) melody and the *chatri* drama style

SCENE & CHARACTER

Ram Chom Dong Nai · Ram Chom Dong Nok

Ram Ar-wut — the weapon dance

Ram Ok Phasa — the character dances

"admiring the forest," martial forms, and portraits of many peoples

Marks of a Fine Nang

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|---|
| 01 | Fidelity to Tradition | Every position accurate to the <i>jariit</i> — the inherited canon. |
| 02 | Unity | Movement, rhythm, music, and emotion resolved into a single line. |
| 03 | Poise & Line | Balanced weight and clean, rounded shapes held with quiet control. |
| 04 | Expressive Restraint | Feeling conveyed with economy — presence without excess. |

To Receive & To Keep

A dancer's task is twofold: **to receive the transmission** faithfully (*rap thai-thot*) and **to conserve** the heritage (*anurak*) for those who follow.

This asks for discipline, respect for the *khru* (teacher), and the patient, analytical study that lets a living tradition endure.

The dancer carries

Discipline in the body

Respect for the teacher

Heritage for the next dancer

IN ONE LINE

*"Grace is discipline
made visible."*

The Nang teaches that beauty is not display but restraint — a body trained so completely that its control looks like ease. To dance the female character well is to hold tradition gently, and pass it on whole.