

## **Features of Kammu music terminology – A musico-linguistic study**

**Håkan Lundström and Jan-Olof Svantesson**

Lund University, Sweden

### **Background**

Music terminology has seldom been studied by linguists except as a by-product of, for instance, the compilation of a dictionary. Some ethnomusicologists have cared for the matter, normally as an integrated part in studies of musical cultures. When linguists deal with musical terms they are usually not exact enough from an ethnomusicological point of view. On the other hand, ethnomusicologists normally lack the necessary linguistic training to be able to analyze and fully use their language material.

In a historical perspective, organologists, who study the details and history of musical instruments, used similarities in the names of instruments for comparative purposes, much in the same manner as ethnographers did. This use of music terminology still occurs. Alan P. Merriam approached music terminology as a general phenomenon in *The Anthropology of Music* (1964). He recognized 'verbal behavior' as one of a number of important factors in a music culture and he concluded that the verbal behaviour concerning music in the World's cultures ranged from very little discussion to elaborate and technical verbalizations. Ethnomusicologists like Bruno Nettl and Bela Foltin (1972) concerning Iran, Alain Daniélou (1966) concerning India and John Blacking (1967) concerning Venda children's songs, have built their studies completely on the insider's terminology. This has since then become normal in ethnomusicological studies. In *Sound and sentiment* (1982) Steven Feld drew upon his background in linguistics in an ethnomusicological study of songs of the Kaluli of New Guinea. He used indigenous terminology of music and birds in order to understand underlying symbolic concepts.

In this paper our respective backgrounds in ethnomusicology and linguistics are the starting point for a description of Kammu music terminology with the aims to isolate similarities and differences to other music cultures in Southeast Asia and to identify categories in the traditional Kammu concept of music.

### Instrument names

Some names of musical instruments are related to those of neighbouring peoples, and are most probably borrowed: *kḍḍḍḍ* 'gong' (Lao, Thai), *mḍḍḍḍ* 'large bossed gong' (Lao, Thai), *crḍḍḍḍ* 'cymbals' (Lao, Thai), *rḍḍḍḍ* 'jew's harp' (Thai *hoon*).

Other instrument names seem to be indigenous. Many of them are obviously onomatopoeic, such as several names of wind instruments, which begin with *t-*:

<i>túut</i>	end-blown water-buffalo horn,
<i>tpú</i>	side-blown free-reed horn
<i>tḍḍḍḍ</i>	flute
<i>tlwḍḍḍ</i>	flute

The corresponding instruments have quite different names among surrounding peoples.

The names of several idiophones of bamboo or wood begin with the minor syllable *k-*, *kl-* or *kr-*, which suggests that they are indigenous Mon-Khmer words:

<i>kltḍḍḍḍ</i>	bamboo concussion tubes [ <i>Calung</i> (Java)]
<i>trḍḍḍḍ kntúik</i>	bamboo stamping tubes
<i>k'lóok</i>	slit-drum of bamboo
<i>krlḍḍḍḍ</i>	long wooden slit-drum
<i>krlḍḍḍḍ</i>	copper bell with a round opening and a clapper inside
<i>klpḍḍḍḍ</i>	buffalo or cow bell made from a piece of bamboo or a calabash

A special category term is *pḥḥḥḍḍ* which denotes struck instruments with a membrane or a string (cf. Lundström and Tayanin 1981 and 1982):

<i>pḥḥḥḍḍ wàan</i>	'long drum', long double-headed wooden drum
<i>pḥḥḥḍḍ klúk</i>	small single-headed wooden drum
<i>pḥḥḥḍḍ prḍḍḍḍ</i>	'monk drum', small hourglass drum
<i>pḥḥḥḍḍ pḍḍḍḍ</i>	idiochordic bamboo zither
<i>pḥḥḥḍḍ pté</i>	'earth drum', a ground harp

The words *klúk* and *pḍḍḍḍ* are onomatopoeic.

### Terms of instrumental ensemble playing

In the Kammu language there is a rich terminology describing characteristics of various kinds of musical function and musical performances. Though a number of terms are abstract, there seems to be no overall term comparable to the term *music* and no word expressing that a piece of music is beautiful.

There is a rather exact terminology for percussive playing manners. This can be exemplified by terms referring to ensembles of bamboo concussion tubes called *kltḍḍḍḍ*. These may be struck simultaneously, *kmtḍḍḍḍ*, or in alternation, *trsúhsífs*. In the latter case the individual instrumentalists in the ensemble are grouped according to the following schedule:

<i>kmnðo</i>	beginner (< <i>kso</i> 'to begin')
<i>pmðoy</i>	follower (< <i>pðoy</i> 'to repeat')
<i>kmtéc</i>	stopper
<i>rtlðot</i>	never stopping (=bourdon) (< <i>lðot</i> 'to go on, not stop')

This terminology describes what is known as a colotomic pattern and has counterpoints in Javanese *angklung* tradition (Kunst 1973). In this respect Kammu musical terminology rather closely reflects Kammu musical traditions.

### Voice character

Voice is called *tróŋ* 'throat'. A nice voice is called *tróŋ mian* 'nice throat' or *tróŋ tró* 'suitable throat'. A bad voice is called *tróŋ hmpðoc* 'hairy throat', i.e. a voice that makes you feel like itching (the word *hmpðoc* denotes the itching hairs that grow on certain plants).

The general word for 'sound' is *síaŋ*. It can be used for pitch. Thus, *síaŋ nè* 'small sound' or *síaŋ còŋ* 'high sound' denote high pitch, and *síaŋ nám* 'big sound' or *síaŋ hntè* 'low sound' denote low pitch. The word *síaŋ* is also used for other sound qualities. The following apply to the human voice:

<i>síaŋ hncim</i>	soft sound, weak sound
<i>síaŋ kràŋ</i>	hard sound
<i>síaŋ prèek</i>	shrill sound
<i>síaŋ kmpòŋ</i>	low-pitched sound
<i>síaŋ hntúr</i>	'slack sound', i.e. muffled sound
<i>síaŋ klyðŋ</i>	'swimming sound', i.e. rolling sound

### Song categories

A number of verbs meaning 'to sing' denote various degrees of recitation or singing, which are related to specific traditional musical situations, and to sex or age groups. Each of these types of singing employs one melody type, i.e. each type is monothematic in the sense that one melody type is used for a number of song-poems:

<i>tóam</i>	singing of the kind used at social parties
<i>hrh</i>	singing of the kind used outside the party situation
<i>yàam</i>	'weeping', i.e. singing done by women
<i>hrwə</i>	singing with the refrain <i>hrwə</i>
<i>húuwə</i>	singing with the refrain <i>húuwə</i>

The word *tóam* is also used as the general verb for 'sing'. The noun *trnəam* is derived from this verb by the noun-forming infix *-rn-*. It means 'song-poem', but is also used in a general sense meaning 'any type of song', or 'singing', as in *trnəam kəon nè* 'children's song'.

Social singing in different dialect areas is described by the name of the area: *tóam Yúan*, *tóam Kwèen*, *tóam Cwàa*, *tóam Úu*, *tóam Lúan Pràbáan*.

Other songs that belong to certain situations, ceremonies or rituals have their names after the situation, or the function within that situation:

<i>lùŷ kʰɔŋ sís</i>	'lull child to sleep', lullaby
<i>lɔŋŋ ŋɔɔr</i>	'showing the way', sung at funeral wakes in order to guide the soul of the deceased to the land of the dead
<i>yàam róoy</i>	'cry for the spirit', dirge
<i>kʰəy kmà</i>	'calling the rain'
<i>ɔɔc</i>	'begging', a wassail song after the harvest
<i>yùun ñiŋ</i>	'stamping tube dance', song at house-building feast
<i>yùun rwàay</i>	'tiger dance', song to drive out the tiger spirit

### Singing styles

The following are names of three distinct styles of singing:

<i>təəm síaŋ ktám</i>	sing heavily
<i>təəm síaŋ hmcàal</i>	sing lightly
<i>təəm káp kràan</i>	sing in a relaxed way

Songs can be sung quickly without holding out individual tones or they can be sung so that certain tones are long. These are referred to as 'short' and 'stretched out' respectively:

<i>təəm làt lòot</i>	'sing shortly', i.e. sing quickly without pausing
<i>təəm tɔɔc ñɔɔt</i>	'sing stretched out', i.e. sing slowly with many long tones

Other ways to express these contrasting manners and to describe various ways of prolonged tones are:

<i>təəm síaŋ plók plók</i>	'sing with a jumping sound', i.e. sing staccato
<i>təəm krli krlàŋ</i>	'sing in circles', i.e. continue to sing on final tones of phrases to an undulating melodic movement

Several terms denote various kinds of legato singing. Many of them refer to an undulating melodic movement. The phrase *təəm knhúul knhəc* has several meanings. The verb *knhúul* means 'to breathe as if breathless' and also describes the sound of the wedge-tailed pigeon, *htóoc*. If a person sings like this, people can say that he sings like this pigeon. This verb also describes the sound of the flute *tɔɔt* and the bamboo idiophone *tàawtāaw* (the so called 'tuning fork' or *rere*, cf. Kaudern 1927). The verb *knhəc* means 'puff as if breathless'. In singing, the expression *təəm knhúul knhəc* refers to a longdrawn phrase sung to a deep breath, but there is also a short rhythmic-melodic pattern which is repeated in this legato manner with a rhythmic pulse reminiscent of short puffs. In certain cases the singer may employ the technique of singing while catching his breath. The words