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 a 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 Foltín (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: kɔɔŋ ‘gong’ (Lao, Thai), mɔɔŋ ‘large bossed gong’ (Lao, Thai), créeng ‘cymbals’ (Lao, Thai), róŋ ‘jew’s harp’ (Thai hooŋ).

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

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\begin{align*}
túut & \quad \text{end-blown water-buffalo horn,} \\
tpú & \quad \text{side-blown free-reed horn} \\
tst & \quad \text{flute} \\
tlwɛəl & \quad \text{flute}
\end{align*}
\]

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:

\[
\begin{align*}
kltɔŋ & \quad \text{bamboo concussion tubes [Calung (Java)]} \\
trà kntiŋk & \quad \text{bamboo stamping tubes} \\
k't̪'ok & \quad \text{slit-drum of bamboo} \\
klàk & \quad \text{long wooden slit-drum} \\
krlɛŋ & \quad \text{copper bell with a round opening and a clapper inside} \\
klpək & \quad \text{buffalo or cow bell made from a piece of bamboo or a calabash}
\end{align*}
\]

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

\[
\begin{align*}
průŋ waːŋ & \quad \text{‘long drum’, long double-headed wooden drum} \\
průŋ klûk & \quad \text{small single-headed wooden drum} \\
průŋ prà & \quad \text{‘monk drum’, small hourglass drum} \\
průŋ pəɛt & \quad \text{idiochordic bamboo zither} \\
průŋ ptè & \quad \text{‘earth drum’, a ground harp}
\end{align*}
\]

The words klûk and pəɛt 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 kltɔŋ. These may be struck simultaneously, kmṭlàn, or in alternation, ṭsuḥsí. In the latter case the individual instrumentalists in the ensemble are grouped according to the following schedule:
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 trōŋ ‘throat’. A nice voice is called trōŋ mían ‘nice throat’ or
trōŋ tró ‘suitable throat’. A bad voice is called trōŋ hmpɔочек ‘hairy throat’, i.e. a
voice that makes you feel like itching (the word hmpɔочек denotes the itching hairs
that grow on certain plants).

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

- sian hncim: soft sound, weak sound
- sian krâŋ: hard sound
- sian prêek: shrill sound
- sian kmpâŋ: low-pitched sound
- sian hntúr: ‘slack sound’, i.e. muffled sound
- sian kly☑çon: ‘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:

- tɔɔm: singing of the kind used at social parties
- hrhi: singing of the kind used outside the party situation
- yàam: ‘weeping’, i.e. singing done by women
- hrwɔ: singing with the refrain hrwɔ
- huuwɔ: singing with the refrain huuwɔ

The word tɔɔm is also used as the general verb for ‘sing’. The noun trnɔɔm is
derived from this verb by the noun-forming infix -r-. It means ‘song-poem’, but is
also used in a general sense meaning ‘any type of song’, or ‘singing’, as in trnɔɔm
kɔɔn nè ‘children’s song’.

Social singing in different dialect areas is described by the name of the area:
tɔɔm Yùan, tɔɔm Kwèen, tɔɔm Cwàa, tɔɔm Ûu, tɔɔm Lüan Prábáan.
Other songs that belong to certain situations, ceremonies or rituals have their names after the situation, or the function within that situation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{luy kəɔn sis} & \quad \text{‘lull child to sleep’, lullaby} \\
\text{ləəŋ ṣɔər} & \quad \text{‘showing the way’, sung at funeral wakes in order to guide the soul of the deceased to the land of the dead} \\
\text{yəam ɾəoɣ} & \quad \text{‘cry for the spirit’, dirge} \\
\text{kəʃəy kmə} & \quad \text{‘calling the rain’} \\
\text{₃əc} & \quad \text{‘begging’, a wassail song after the harvest} \\
\text{yùun ʔiŋ} & \quad \text{‘stamping tube dance’, song at house-building feast} \\
\text{yùun rwəay} & \quad \text{‘tiger dance’, song to drive out the tiger spirit}
\end{align*}
\]

**Singing styles**
The following are names of three distinct styles of singing:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{təəm sɨaŋ kʈám} & \quad \text{sing heavily} \\
\text{təəm sɨaŋ hmcəal} & \quad \text{sing lightly} \\
\text{təəm kəp krəən} & \quad \text{sing in a relaxed way}
\end{align*}
\]

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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{təəm lət ləot} & \quad \text{‘sing shortly’, i.e. sing quickly without pausing} \\
\text{təəm təc ɾəot} & \quad \text{‘sing stretched out’, i.e. sing slowly with many long tones}
\end{align*}
\]

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

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{təəm sɨaŋ ploŋ ploŋ} & \quad \text{‘sing with a jumping sound’, i.e. sing staccato} \\
\text{təəm kɾli kɾləŋ} & \quad \text{‘sing in circles’, i.e. continue to sing on final tones of phrases to an undulating melodic movement}
\end{align*}
\]

Several terms denote various kinds of legato singing. Many of them refer to an undulating melodic movement. The phrase \text{təəm knhúul knhəəc} has several meanings. The verb \text{knhúul} means ‘to breathe as if breathless’ and also describes the sound of the wedge-tailed pigeon, \text{htəc}. If a person sings like this, people can say that he sings like this pigeon. This verb also describes the sound of the flute \text{təoŋ} and the bamboo idiophone \text{təawtəaw} (the so called ‘tuning fork’ or \text{rere}, cf. Kaudern 1927). The verb \text{knhəəc} means ‘puff as if breathless’. In singing, the expression \text{təəm knhúul knhəəc} 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
knhúul and knhóoc both have an onomatopoeic element and a prefix kn-: verbs of the form kn-X have the general meaning ‘to make the sound X’.

A long tone at the lower pitch in the end of phrases that are slowly dying out is called sıan klyɔŋ, which translates as ‘swimming sound’. The idea is that the movement is slow and rather level, i.e. only slightly undulating with small intervals.

The phrase sıan klwí ‘whirling sound’, refers to a longdrawn diminuendo in a soft voice. The word klwí means ‘to whirl, to circulate’ like water where a stream is hindered and turns another way. It can also be used for describing the resonance of a drum. The expression sıan kúurí has a similar meaning.

Terms relating to poetry
To complete the rhymes, that is to sing the whole trnɔem song-poem consisting of for example two units in which the rhyme-words are completed in the second unit, is called to prkàay ‘to give back, to return’ the rhyme-words (<kàay ‘to come back, to return’). The rhyme-words are called kàm prkàay ‘words which are returned’. The term prkàay makes extra sense if one imagines a singing situation where singer A sings the first trnɔem unit and leaves to singer B to sing the second unit, that is to continue the song-poem and complete the rhymes. This can be likened to catching a ball which has been thrown by somebody else or by oneself. Sıan prkàay means ‘echo’.

To complete the rhymes is described with the word kák ‘rich, well-filled’: tɔem kák. To go on singing without completing the rhymes is considered to make the singing hóŋ ‘thin’ as opposed to well-filled: tɔem hóŋ.

To mix parts of different trnɔem without finishing any may be called tɔem prklák-prklík ‘sing helter-skelter’ or tɔem prcàar prclír ‘sing sparsely’, jumping from one place to another (<càar ‘sparse, thin’).

To add many words without poetic structure into the performance is expressed with the word còp or kpcòp meaning ‘to babble’: tɔem còp cànaj ‘sing babble-babble’ or tɔem kpcòp ‘sing babbling’.

To be able to prolong the trnɔem with beautiful and polite words is considered a good quality of a singer. Adding words to a song-poem in performance is called sıan tɔoc ‘prolonged sound’. When, for example, a phrase of the trnɔem is finished and prolonged with the words deè nàaj ‘Oh, my dear’, the singer may continue to sing beautiful or polite words for some time.

Conclusions
A general characteristic of Kammu music terminology is that it is particularly rich where musical functions and situations are concerned. This is shared with many other societies which are not socially very stratified and in which people in general join in many musical situations (cf. for example Feld 1982). In Kammu society, there is no term or specialisation corresponding to musician.
A number of names for musical instruments point at relations to surrounding peoples. But it is also possible to interpret the terminology as representing certain categories:

*the k-group* with names beginning with *k*, *kl*, or *kr* consists of idiophones, mainly of bamboo or wood.

*the t-group* contains onomatopoeic names for wind instruments.

*the prīng group* includes instruments which in Western scientific classification systems are defined as belonging to different categories, namely drums (membranophones), zithers, and ground harps (chordophones). The playing manner is the common denominator since they are all struck instruments. To strike is called *tām* and the object with which one strikes is called *trnām* ‘drumstick’ (unless only hands are used) – like *trnām*, this word is formed with the nominalizing infix -*m*.

*The terminology concerning various forms of social singing – as opposed to ceremonial or ritual singing* – is particularly rich. Numerous terms denote qualities of voice and performance, mainly in combination with the word *sian* ‘sound’. Certain terms denote abstract musical factors like melodic movement, sometimes by means of symbolic reference to nature (like birds or water). The terms for social music genres define a category system which is closely related to the practices in this particular society. It consists of a number of song-poems which are performed in various monothematic genres related to specific sex, age, specific situations and their location in space and time.

**References**


