

Desana Mahachat Melody “Rabam Desana” in Seven Lanna Provinces, Northern Thailand

Ong-art Inthaniwet, Narongchai Pidokrajt

ABSTRACT--- *The Desana Mahachat Melody comes from a performative text which applies from the specific melody which as an important cultural phenomenon of the seven Lanna Provinces in Northern Thailand. Seven different melodies features identified and analyzed through interviews, documentations, focus group, and interview for 25 respondent and secondary data of historical audio recordings of local religious teachings using the “Rabam Desana” melody style. These results applied to understand about the sustainability of these different melodies within contemporary religious discourse in Northern Thailand.*

Index Terms— *Desana Mahachat Melody, Lanna Provinces, Northern Thailand, Rabam Desana.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The traditional Lanna melody “Ves-Son-Dorn-Cha-Dok Desana” is one kind of melody used in a Buddhist sermon. It is used for Buddhist people to understand the different life reincarnations of the Buddha. Since different life reincarnations have lessons to learn using this narrative style known as “Dhammavatra Desana” or “Mahachat Desana” which in Northern Lanna style is called “Rabam Mahachat”. The concept of “Mahachat Desana” can enhance inspire, encourage and significantly touch on the audience’s mind for peace, and feeling the beauty of the melody, and rising their aesthetic appreciation of the melody. It somehow answered the religious objectives in terms of faith, appreciation of the Dhamma, and resulted in better understanding of Buddhism.

Thus, this study was conducted in seven Lanna provinces in northern Thailand. The purposes are to analysis the “Mahachat Desana” melody found in these provinces in order to identify the musical identities hidden behind them in terms of forms, instructions, their utilization and their processes [1]-[3]. The main purpose of this study to determine the both historical knowledge of Rabam Desana in seven Lanna Provinces and analyzed the musical identity characteristics together with processes in Rabam Desana in Northern Thailand. The results of this present study not only encourage people to realize the values of local cultural music, but also results in contributing to local musical preservation. Moreover, findings also can be disseminated and result in sustainable cultural knowledge of local wisdom in Lanna music and beneficial for the combination of music study and other related fields in terms of Ethnomusicology’s decoding within the cultural context [4], [5].

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This research is to study the music melody of preaching in religious teaching by using the Ethnomusicological approach. The data is particularly important for better understanding intercultural communication taking place with religious narratives using local melodies within the context of Northern Thailand. The findings are significant because they will help to provide for better understanding of melody types during contemporary discourse among the people occupying the seven provinces of Northern Thailand.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research participants consisted of three major groups: (1) scholars, (2) monks (those who preached), and (3) general people. To obtain research data, the researchers did a survey through YouTube, Facebook, and website of those people who are knowledgeable and have experience in the Rabam Desana and approached them for interview concerning the traditional Mahachat Desana.

This study employed semi-structured interview for data collection in order to collect in-depth data from the participants. The in-deep interview 25 persons consisted of twelve questions. They were divided into three parts. The first part, was used to focus group the participants about their knowledge of “Rabam Desana” melody in seven Lanna Provinces. The second part, was used to collect data of the participants’ understanding of music melody found in “Rabam Desana”.

The last part, was used to gather the participants’ comprehensive of the content stories in the “Rabam Desana” preaching. Before conducting the interview, the participants were informed the purposes of the research and asked to signed the research consent forms if they volunteer to get involve with the research. The participants were informed for data confidentiality and allowed them to withdraw at any time they felt uncomfortable at the interviews. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted approximately 45 – 60 minutes for each interview. After the interview, the audio recorded were immediately transcribed and analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Historical Knowledge of Rabam Desana in Seven Lanna Provinces

Findings revealed that “Rabam Ma-Now-Long-Khong” is the local traditional Rabam Desana in Chiang Rai, and Phayao province. The meaning of Rabam Ma-Now-Long-

Khong is the metaphorical images of “the lemon is floating in the Mekong River” since these regions are located alongside the Mekong River. Therefore, Rabam Desana is called according the river’s name “Mekong River”. The word, “Long” came from the Thai word, “Loi” which represented the meaning of floating [6]-[8].

Regarding “Rabam Phao-Kwai-Bai”, it is popular among people in the most areas of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, and some community areas in Chiang Rai and Phayao provinces. The words “Phao” represents coconut tree and “Kwai-Bai” represents the character of the moving coconut branches forced by the wind. Thus, the use of sound production techniques in “Rabam Phao-Kwai-Bai” conveys the metaphorical images of coconut branches. It represents the moving through the use of high voice within the speech alongside with the combination of inside and outside intonation, a single inside intonation, and the Melismatic Singing through Long-Low-Tone voice and Long-High-Tone voice. Due to the use of several techniques related to its principles of inside and outside intonation, the monk preachers could be divided into two groups included the group of small and midrange tone, and group of low pitch tone [9]-[11].

For “Rabam Nham-Tok-Tard”, it is popular for the Rabam Desana in the areas of Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Chiang Rai, Phayao that had developed through the “Dhamma Watra Desana” having the flat stable intonation style alongside with the use of strong stressing and applying lack of melismatic singing. Thus, the use of both “Rabam Phao-Kwai-Bai” and “Rabam Nham-Tok-Tard” apparently become popular because people prefer to use this Desana in their regions [12].

On the other hand, “Nham-Tok-Tard” consists of the compound words originating from the words “Nham” and “Tok-Tard” which “Tok-Tard” represents the natural waterfall movement. Hence, the “Rabam Nham-Tok-Tard” is the metaphorical images applying the sound of preaching style. It has flat stable intonation style alongside with the use of strong stressing which applying lack of melismatic singing. It is similar to the sounds of water falling from the edge of the roof. The “Rabam Nham-Tok-Tard” is focusing on the use of normal preaching without “Rabam” or chanting. The popularity is the use of “Jun-La-Pon”, “Maha-Pon”, and “Wana-Pa-Wesana” for chanting [13]-[15].

Findings demonstrated that “Rabam Mang-Pu-Chom-Duang” is the local traditional Rabam Desana of Lampang province which applies the characteristics of great bees flying around the pollen of the flower. The word “Mang-Pu” represents the great bees, and the word “Chom-Duang” stand for the characteristic of swarming around the pollen of the flower. In addition, the performance of this Desana presents the sound of bees flying and swarming around the flowers as the metaphorical images of its movement and pause of bee’s flying from flower to another. It also represents its relationship to the constant trembling sound of wing’s movement [16].

B. The Musical Identity Characteristics and Processes in Rabam Desana in Northern Thailand

The Rabam Ma-Now-Long-Khong has unique characteristics in preaching consisted of high and low sound,

play and stop steps. The unique style of Rabam Ma-Now-Long-Khong could be seen through the use of the One Note One Word of Syllabic Text Setting with the last syllable adding alongside with the melody of Sixteen Note style, and the 7 groups of tone similar to the G Mixolydian Mode.

Rabam Nok-Khao-Hern’s musical identity is disclosed through the use of “Uh” sound which apparently became the major component of Desana. In addition, the patterns of “Uh” techniques as the tradition word usage could be categorized into Melismatic Text Setting mode, and the One Note One Word as define as a Syllabic Text Setting technique was used in the part of regular preaching and the Neumatic Text Setting using One Word chanting to Two or Three Notes. Furthermore, the style of the melody of Rabam was found that the use of “Nao”, the lower note to higher note drawling techniques and the opposite were popular which could be classified within the mode of Glissando technique. Beyond that, the groups of tone usage in Rabam Desana were revealed that there would be the similarity to G Natural Minor Scale and G Natural Minor Scale.

The voice techniques used for “Rabam Kwang-Deon-Dong” in Desana could be classified as follows: The use of “Uh” sound is the identity of “Rabam Kwang-Deon-Dong” which composes with the techniques of slow pace, strong and clear sound, and the use of trembling sound at the end of the voice.

The trembling sound of the end of the voice or the techniques of clucking sound from the throat or coloratura is used at the end of the sentence with the loud clear voice and the techniques of the slow pace swing drawling sound arranging. The musical identity of Rabam Kwang-Deon-Dong is quite similar to Rabam Nok-Khao-Hern’s musical identity but some alternation due to its unique intonation such as the up-turn and down-turn pitch as the metaphorical images of Kwang-Deon-Dong or the character of deer, beware of danger by constant moving their head. On the top of that, the style of trilling of Rabam Kwang-Deon-Dong that might be strong and clear this matched the G Mixolydian Mode Scale.

There is the identity of styles of Rabam Desana that could be divided into 3 parts such as: (1) The use of introduction of Rabam Chang-Kham-Tong would be the single application with the several breathing designs and related to “Uh” sound. (2) There is the use of tradition word with clear intonation and the major techniques in each sentence. And, (3) There is the use of words stressing with the clear intonation of preaching alongside with the unsteady tone, the fast and slow rhythm based on the emotional details of stories.

The musical identity of Rabam Chang-Kham-Tong was defined by the strong and clear word that related to the use of Syllabic Text Setting with the style of the longer drawling. Moreover, the use of the tone could be divided into 4 groups such as F, Ab, Bb and Eb. On the top of that, through the universal scale comparison as its tone analysis, the research finding revealed that there was the use of the tone as F Pentatonic Minor without C.

C. The Processes of Mahachat Rabam Desana Presentation

In conclusion, the results of the present study presented the research contributions in several aspects to different areas as indicated with the valuable knowledge gained from the research might lead to the potential solution to formally develop and enhance the Mahachat Rabam Desana melody. Also, it demonstrated that the melody and the rhythm of local Lanna Mahachat Rabam Desana could be the valuable resources in terms of music composing applying into local rhythm and melody analysis and its further study. This study also suggests that further studies should be emphasized on individual unique Desana styles, integrating diverse Desana styles in terms of applied melody which originated by its innovation or the combination between the conventional melody and new pattern, and comparative study of Lanna Rabam Desana should be conducted in other regions in order to explore their processes of knowledge dissemination and improvement for better solution mechanism.

Findings showed that the Mahachat Desana wisdom found related to seven Lanna provinces provided significant information of authentic northern Thai melody which differently applied the local stories and cultural references in each area. This finding was similar finding found in the

study of local Rabam of Phra Kru Adul Srila Kitti (2008, 92-93) and Phra Maha-Somchart Non-Ta-Thammi-Go (Bhusa-Nareeya) (2006, 50-52) who stated that there was the cultural mobility within the Lanna territory caused by the use of different Desana masters or nonlocal preachers in order to demonstrate the Rabam Desana. In other words, the multicultural blending in terms of the local Rabam originated by applying the diversity of Mahachat Rabam Desana style of monks (the preachers) (Table 1 and Fig. 1).

In addition, Phra Kru Adul Srila Kitti (Interviews, 2016) also highlighted that Chiang Rai and Phayao’s Rabam Ma-Now-Long-Khong was classified as the ancient Rabam that might be created before the other cities’ local Rabam and there would be the development of other related local Rabam through the use of foundation of Rabam Ma-Now-Long-Khong style. Through the study, it could be assumed that the Chiang Saen’s population migration to other cities for the purpose of seeking asylum around the Chiang Mai area. At that period of time, it might have caused the constant development of contemporary melody of Rabam Desana through the diverse style of composing, lyric writing and the melody of related nonlocal preachers.

Table 1: Number of preachers used to Rabam Desana in seven Lanna province

Province	Rabam Desana in Seven Lanna Province						
	Ma-Now-Long-Khong	Phao-Kwai-Bai	Nham-Tok-Tard	Mang-Pu-Chom-Duang	Nok-Khao-Hern	Kwang-Deon-Dong	Chang-Kham-Ton
Chiang Rai	4	2	3	-	-	-	-
Phayao	3	1	2	-	-	-	-
Chiang Mai	-	22	25	-	-	-	-
Lamphun	-	2	2	-	-	-	-
Lampang	5	-	-	5	-	-	-
Phrae	-	-	-	-	4	1	-
Nan	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Total	12	27	32	5	4	1	2
The percentage of the different types of Rabam Desana	14	33	39	6	5	1	2

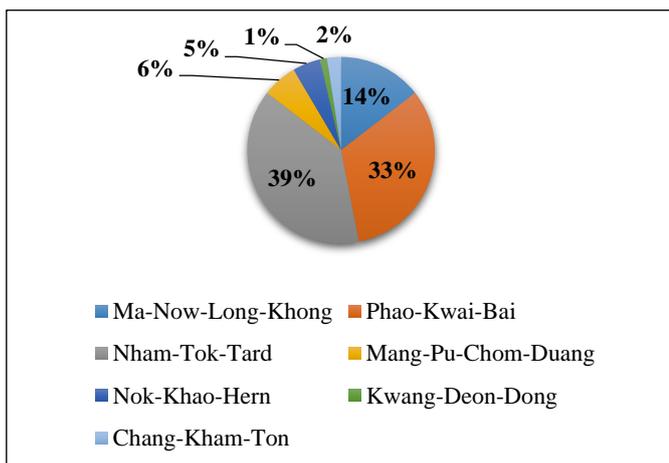


Fig. 1: Percentage of the different types of Rabam Desana

On the other hand, through Rabam Mang-Pu-Chom-Duang’s analysis, the finding was revealed that the principles of Rabam Mang-Pu-Chom-Duang were its usage of the "Nham-Num Uh" and the "Words combining Uh". In addition, in the individual part of Tiew Dhamma of each "Kan (chapter)" would demonstrate the same process of Rabam Ma-Now-Long-Khong style which convinced that Rabam Ma-Now-Long-Khong had played the crucial roles in the development of Lanna Rabam Desana and influenced other related styles of Rabam Desana for a long time. In the musical identity of Rabam Desana study, the findings apparently disclosed that there was the aesthetical hidden contribution of 7 Lanna Rabam



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Desana which could be analyzed through its music components by the comparison of western chanting's melody pattern. In other words, the Mahachat Rabam Desana could be categorized into the universal style of music due to its qualification that fit into the specified music principles and recording system as same as the international music notes.

IV. CONCLUSION

Recommendations and its relationships to the research contribution could be presented into several aspects such as the valuable knowledge gained from the research might lead to the potential solution to formally develop and enhance the Mahachat Rabam Desana melody, the melody and the rhythm of local Lanna Mahachat Rabam Desana could be the valuable resources in terms of music composing applying, the research finding could be contributed to the local rhythm and melody analysis and its further study.

Then, the further research suggestion such as the individual unique Desana styles was required, the diverse of Desana styles in terms of applied melody which originated by its innovation or the combination between the conventional melody and new pattern should be conducted, the comparative study of Lanna Rabam Desana and its related Desana of other regions might be interesting and worth to embark on it and the process of knowledge dissemination might be developed and improved in order to find the better solution mechanism.

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