

Khse-muoy in the Kingdom of Cambodia

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Abstract

The Khse-muoy is a traditional Cambodian chordophone instrument played by strumming and is capable of producing harmonic notes. Khse-muoy is a primary instrument in traditional Cambodian ensembles and provides music and entertainment for Cambodian traditions, celebrations, ceremonies and rituals. This qualitative study aimed at : 1) to study about the teaching process of Khse-muoy in Cambodia and 2) to study about the role of Khse-muoy in Cambodian traditions. The field data were obtained through interviews and observations with the Key informants which consisted professional Khse-muoy musicians and teachers. Casual informants, in Cambodia October 2014 to September 2015.

The results of the study showed that Teaching Khse-muoy in the Kingdom of Cambodia are consistent and follow oral tradition and can be classified into 4 aspects of 1) teachers characteristics, 2) teaching location, 3) content and 4) teaching mediums. The primary instructors of Khse-muoy are the professional Khse-muoy musicians themselves but can also include senior students which aid in the lessons and practices by providing students with a model to follow on. The location of the lessons and teachings is different according to each teacher and it is usually the Khse-muoy musicians themselves who will decide on the location of the lessons. The content of the lessons on Khse-muoy are compiled directly by the Khse-muoy teachers and usually encompasses music and songs that accompany tradition activities. The learning materials of Khse-muoy may differ from teacher to teacher but the essential medium is the Khse-muoy instrument itself and not all classes and lessons are performed by following music notes. The majority of lessons are usually oral lessons and demonstrations by the teacher and senior students. And current the role of khse-muoy in the Cambodian tradition in the three most popular traditions for Khse-muoy are phiti rieb-ka (wedding ceremony), phiti kat so (cork shaving ceremony) and phiti-ara (healing ritual).

Keywords: Khse-Muoy, Gourde Lute, Indigenous Music, Teaching, Cambodia

Introduction

Khse-muoy (gourd lute) is also known as say-diev and khse-diev and is a traditional Cambodian string chordophone. Khse-muoy is considered by Cambodian musicians to be one of the oldest instruments in Cambodia and is a part of traditional arak and kar ensembles (Terry Miller, Sean Williams 2008) The Khse-muoy is very popular among Cambodian musicians and

audiences because it produces a resonant pleasing sound and engaging music entertainment. The Khse-muoy is an ancient Cambodian musical instrument which was influenced by Indian culture (C V Raman 1920) Indian culture was inherited and influenced many countries and tribal communities in the mountains and forest that border the ancient Khmer kingdom (Roger Blench 2006) The countries

influenced by Indian culture include Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand. Evidence of the Indian lute can be seen engraved in carvings at the Da Nang Museum in Vietnam (Ngoc, Huynh Thi 2002) Ancient lute musicians can also be seen engraved at the balcony at Angkor Wat and at the ancient complex of Bayon temple.

Traditional music provides Cambodian celebrations and rituals with entertainment for the guests and is highly revered by the people of Cambodia (Ratchakrit Kongpinitbovorn 2010) The Khse-muoy is performed as a solo instrument as well as a member of an ensemble which is usually present at important Cambodian traditions such as weddings and healing rituals (Silva, R.C.L., 2014) Music and performing arts have always been a part of Cambodian society since ancient times. Cambodian music culture is a rich custom and includes many musical instruments and types of music to accompany traditional and conventional celebrations which is an integral part of Cambodian livelihood (Kaew Narom 2011) Music to Cambodians is a means to live in harmony with nature and is also a method of treatment for illness and the health of an individual. Traditional Cambodian musical instruments and ensembles can be defined into many categories and is being developed and revitalized for commercial benefits in communities throughout the country (Sothea Lnes 2011) The Cambodian government supports the conservation and promotion of traditional music and performing arts and is in partnership with leading education institutions which include the University of Fine arts, The Secondary School of Fine Arts) and provincial cultural centers throughout the country. The effort to preserve and revitalize traditional Cambodian music culture is also being supported by private organizations and NGO's which number more than 300 (Ana Maria Clamor 2001) Private organizations are active in community

development and provide music, cultural art and vocational development for impoverished communities and individuals in Cambodia (Cheam Phan Viriya, 2009: 7).

In contemporary times, many professional and renowned Khse-muoy musicians in Cambodia are elderly senior citizens. The transmission of Khse-muoy knowledge, skills and technics to younger generations has proven difficult because of the difficulty of the techniques involved in playing the Khse-muoy which requires patience and dedication. Foreign organizations have supported the conservation of Cambodian traditional music and have established learning centers throughout the country in which professional Cambodian musicians are invited and contracted to pass on their knowledge to enthusiastic students in rural and provincial communities. (Pittayawat Pantasri 2011)

Research Objective

1. To study about the teaching process of Khse-muoy in Cambodia
2. To study about the role of khse-muoy in Cambodian traditions.

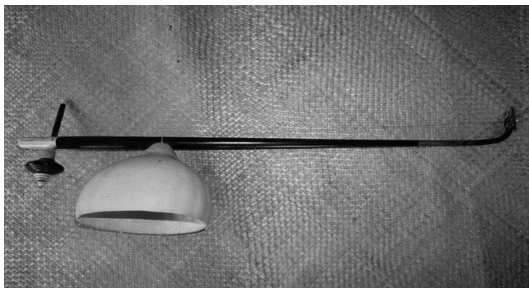
Research Method

This study is a qualitative research. The research aims to study about teaching process of Khse-muoy in Cambodia and study about the role of khse-muoy in Cambodian traditions. Document analysis and field data was collected from October 2014 to September 2015. Field data was collected through interviews and observations through interview forms, observations forms and survey forms. Research informants included key informants which consisted of nine professional Khse-muoy musicians and teachers. Casual informants included six individuals who were

musicians and music scholars in Cambodia and general informants included 15 individuals from the general public. Research results were analyzed by triangulation method and the final results were presented in a descriptive analytical format.

Research Findings

The teaching process of Khse-muoy in the Kingdom of Cambodia involves a process which is similar amongst Khse-muoy teachers and other folk music teaching process. There are practices and rituals that must be performed before lessons which all Khse-muoy teachers follow which include having the students prepare themselves before coming apprentices by preparing 2 sets of homage offerings of tobacco, flowers, incents, candles and 5,000 Cambodian riels. The offering ceremonies are usually performed on Thursday which is considered an auspicious day and the students are accepted by their teachers and start their lessons. The initiation ceremony or student's ritual of Khse-muoy is consistent with Wong, Deborah Anne (1992) and is the same principle with the traditional ceremony of wai-khru in Thailand which is a ceremony to honor one's teacher. The purpose of the ritual is more than just traditional practice but it also represents the spiritual aspect of the student's dedication and honoring of the teacher of whom will be transferring the musical knowledge and skills.



The basics of learning how to play the Khse-muoy include fielding the instrument, posture, hand placements and how to produce musical notes. The music notes that students must first master are the primary notes of "D", "G" and "A". When the students have mastered the three notes, they will learn how to play all the remaining notes until the primary scale notes of "C", "D", "E", "F", "G", "A", "B" and "C" are proficiently reproduced. The next phase is teaching the students how to play the overture chapter and songs. Techniques to playing the Khse-muoy are introduced to students during each song in which students must learn how to change the position of the gourde resonator to create harmonic notes. The process in producing harmonics is done by consistently adjusting the left hand of the musician in opening and closing the mouth of the gourde resonator without distortion.



Khse-muoy teaching methods and preparations in the transfer of musical skills and knowledge follow classic traditions and can be classified into 4 aspects of 1) Teachers Characteristics, 2) Teaching Location, 3) Content and 4) Teaching Mediums. The primary instructors of Khse-muoy are professional Khse-muoy musicians who are the direct teachers but can also include senior students which aid in the lessons and practices by providing students and junior students with a model to follow on. The location of the lessons and teachings is different according to each teacher and it is usually the Khse-muoy musicians themselves who will decide on the location of the lessons. The content of the lessons on Khse-muoy are compiled directly by the Khse-muoy teachers and usually encompasses music and songs that accompany tradition activities. The learning materials of Khse-muoy may differ from teacher to teacher but the essential medium is the Khse-muoy instrument itself and not all classes and lessons are performed by following music notes. The majority of lessons are usually oral lessons and demonstrations by the teacher and senior students. This is consistent with Wimala Siripong (1991) in which similarities and the oral tradition of teaching traditional Thai music is still the dominant choice and method in which teachers rely on for the education of folk music. Khse-muoy teachers continue to provide lessons through the oral tradition and also through example and have their student reproduce the notes until perfection. Most of the lessons rely on the student's memory and the student who can perform the most accurate, receive more examples and lessons from the teacher. All Khse-muoy teachers follow the oral format but there was no clear arrangement of songs that the teachers followed what was identical were the classical ritual songs. The curriculum was reliant upon the teachers themselves and the order of which songs

where taught were not strictly defined.

The results of the study showed that the role of khse-muoy in Cambodian traditions. Is the a primary instrument in traditional Cambodian ensembles and provides music and entertainment for Cambodian traditions, celebrations, ceremonies and rituals. The three most popular traditions for khse-muoy

Phithi-riap-ka (Wedding Ceremony): Khse-muoy has long been associated with Cambodian wedding ceremonies. Traditional music plays a very important part in the celebration of a couple's wedding. Traditional music provides the entertainment and also accompanies the many activities within the wedding. The traditional music ensemble that the Khse-muoy is incorporated within is called the kar ensemble and is fundamentally used in providing indoor music within the ritual. Kar ensemble musicians are usually seated within the main room and their performances is usually on the stage that has been arranged by the hosts. kar ensembles are also used for wedding procession or parading of the groom's dowry. The most important of kar songs include homrong, chao-prueam, kat-trey, lom-niang and som-pong-kat. The homrong song is played at the start of the wedding ceremony to pay homage and tribute to teachers, instructors and also to the residing spirits in presence of the ceremony. The chao-prueam, kat-trey and lom-niang songs are used for the groom's dowry parade towards the bride's home and wedding ceremony. The som-pong-kat song is used when the bride has welcomed the groom's parade. The rieb-kar ritual usually lasts from half a day to 4 days according to the hosts. Additional songs are usually songs for entertainment where male and female singers exchange verses to each other and involve lyrics which reflect the relationships of lovers and comedic gestures of love, harmony and eternity. Kar ensemble instruments include the Khse-muoy,

cha-pey-dong-waeng, trua-khamae, trua-u, sa-ko-dai, pe-o and cymbals.

Phithi-kat-so (Cork Shaving Ceremony): Phithi-kat-so is a traditional ceremony that is practiced in Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Myanmar and is usually performed during the 1st year of the child's birth. In some communities in Cambodia, the ritual is performed when the child is one month of age where all the hair is usually shaved off. Wong pikaao or pikaao ensemble accompanies phithi-kat-so in Cambodian communities and consists of many traditional Cambodian instruments which include the khse-muoy, pikaao, cha-pey-dong-waeng, trua-khamae, trua-u, sa-ko-dai, pe-o and cymbals. There are three songs that are performed during phithi-kat-so which are phleng-nia-ri-long-wek, phleng-kha-mae-dom-bai and phleng-sat-mahori. Other songs from phithi-kat-so such as phleng-kat-so, phleng-salika-kaeo and phleng-tra-biang-bia are also popular choices among hosts.

Phiti-ara (Healing Ritual): Many Cambodians believe in the supernatural, spirits and deities and their powers in providing protection for themselves and their family. Many also believe that worshipping these deities will bring fortune or rainfall to their fields and crops. These traditional animistic beliefs are practiced through ritual activities such as food and nourishment offerings and are always accompanied by traditional music ensembles which incorporate the khse-muoy. Phiti-ara applies traditional music at different stages. Traditional music is played when the practitioners invite the deity to help heal the patient or provide an indication to the person's illness. When the patient has recovered from their ailment, then a ritual and music will be played to re-invite the deity back to receive offerings. The content of phithi-ara songs usually include verses of endearment, homage and sincerity so that the deity will accept their invitation. Traditional music

ensembles that are used in phithi-ara are similar to phithi-rieb-kar and phithi-kat-so but there is much more emphasis on the application of percussions. There are at least 2 to 12 drums used in phithi-ara ensembles. There are 56 songs played at phithi-ara rituals. There are 4 songs that are essential which are phleng-dram-bong-daek, phleng-kha-mao-sat�oe, sa-rai-kha-mao and phleng-wong-sa.

Conclusion

Khse-muoy is a Cambodian string musical instrument which is played by strumming. This instrument requires specialized technique in creating pleasant sounding harmonic notes through the control of the instruments resonator made from dried gourd. Similar preparations and provisions for Khse-muoy education in Cambodia were consistent among all the Khse-muoy teaching facilities in which the teachers and instructors were all professional Khse-muoy musicians and are highly respected and regarded as Khse-muoy authorities within their communities. Their teaching methods and preparations in the transfer of musical skills and knowledge follow classic traditions and can be classified into 4 aspects of 1) Teachers Characteristics, 2) Teaching Location, 3) Content and 5) Teaching Mediums. Traditional folk music and Interest in indigenous knowledge is in revival in Cambodia. The increased popularity in Khse-muoy education is being promoted by government policies in conservation efforts to protect and ensure that Cambodian indigenous knowledge is preserved and transmitted to future generations. The government has emphasized the development and conservation of indigenous culture in order to reinforce indigenous cultures as the prominent feature of Cambodian national identity. Traditional Cambodian music is still very popular at

community levels in which folk music such as the Khse-muoy has been incorporated into traditional celebrations and rituals. The most consistent rituals that have adapted Khse-muoy include phithi-riap-ka (wedding ceremony), phithi-kat-so (cork shaving ceremony) and phithi-ara (healing ritual). Khse-muoy music is considered by many Cambodians to be the most authentic of traditional Cambodian music and is mandatory at weddings in which live performances by the ensemble and Khse-muoy is always preferred.

Discussion

Practicing the various technics of the Khse-muoy until the students are proficient in achieving the desired effects and harmonic notes is consistent with Kim (1996) in which the importance of learning indigenous music and becoming a professional folk musician must emphasize not only the reproduction of notes, but the musician must also master and understand the techniques associated with each instrument. The knowledge, skill and understanding the instrument and music is important in producing music that will engage the audiences and is an aspect that is overlooked in contemporary music education in which they only emphasize reproduction of notes of a song without any understanding of how to adapt and apply different techniques.

The evaluation and appraisals of students by the teachers share the same principle through the student's demonstrations and performances. The emphasis is on the student's ability in the continuation of rhythm and the exact reproduction of musical notes and harmony. The process is carried out by the teacher's institution of a song or chapter of a song and have the students follow until the song is completed. The process is repeated until all the songs related to each

individual ritual or ceremony is thoroughly rehearsed. If the teachers are satisfied with the student's performances, they will be provided with an opportunity to perform live to the public which will be their final exam. This is consistent with Montana Pipatpen (2003) in which Khse-muoy musicians are evaluated similarly with folk music students at primary educational schools in the province of Songkhla in southern Thailand. The folk music teachers and scholars provided the tutoring and also evaluation of students in the same manner. The process of action learning is applied to folk music education in both Thailand and Cambodia and the final exam or final evaluation is through public performances.

The social events that incorporate Khse-muoy instrument is varied according to each community or region throughout the country but most students are instructed to perform at the three most popular traditions which are phithi-riep-ka (wedding ceremonies), phithi kat so (cork shaving ceremony) and phithi-ara (healing ritual). Music plays a very important role in every Rieb-ka ceremonies in Cambodia and reflects the prosperity of the bride and groom and also of their families. The fortunes of the bride and groom are represented by the expanse or amount of guests attending and also the variety of music chosen for the event. Khse-muoy is a prominent musical instruments in traditional ensembles and is always a part of rieb-ka ceremonies. This is consistent McKinley (2002) which also conclude that traditional Cambodian ensembles still play a vital role in wedding ceremonies and is an important factor in providing entertainment and dance music for the hosts and guests for wedding ceremonies and a unique cultural identity of Southeast Asia.

Healing rituals are common in Southeast Asian countries and plays an important role in Cambodian communities reflecting the faith and continuation of spirit worship. The belief in

deities, spirits and supernatural guardians is a contemporary Cambodian faith with ancient origins and is still widely practiced in Cambodia. The songs that accompany the rituals are selected due to the beliefs and traditions that were passed down by their ancestors. The musicians and hosts of each ritual continue to follow and select traditional songs that have accompanied the rituals for generations. This is consistent with Sumate Kongsawat (1986) in which the continuation of traditions and rituals of the community remain unchanged from the past because it represents or symbolizes the distinct cultural characteristics of their community. The most important characteristic is the emphasis on the importance of their beliefs in order to please, support or heal natural or unnatural phenomena. The driving force behind these beliefs is the faith they have in the supernatural in controlling natural disasters and to help relief the community of fear and helplessness.

Suggestions

The research results and knowledge on Khse-muoy education can be utilized to create an applicable Khse-muoy curriculum to be used in public and private sectors in music and educational institutions throughout the world and can be incorporated into indigenous and folk music education in Thailand. Suggested research topics for future studies should include a geographical analysis and study of Khse-muoy in the communities throughout Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, manufacturing and production of Khse-muoy instrument and the role and function of Khse-muoy in traditional performances and also a concise record and analysis of Khse-muoy songs and music of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

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