

# Rabam Desana Preaching:

## *Its Melodic Values To The Telling Of Desana Mahachati Lanna*

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### **Abstract**

Desana Mahachati is an annual Buddhist ceremony which involves monks recounting the story of Enlightenment of the Buddha (the Jataka) to convey dharma. Rabam Desana refers to the particular Lanna melodic and tonal voice style use the telling of this story. It is unique in the use of chest voice, falsetto and vibrato. These vocal techniques are found in six types of Rabam Desana: Manao long khong, Prao kwai bai, Nam tok tad, Mangpu chom duang, Nok khao hern and Chang kham tong. The value of Rabam Desana is that its usage enhances. The story of the Enlightenment for both the listener and the teller using these techniques, with the moods of the characters and the story line being varied and emphasized by tonal and tempo changes. Nowadays, only a handful of Buddhist monks in Northern Thailand practice Rabam Desana in their religious activities.

**Keywords:** Ethnomusicology, Jataka preaching, Lanna, Melody, Rabam Desana

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## Introduction

Historically, the Northern Thai provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Phrae, Nan and Mae Hong Son formed the Kingdom of Lanna. Sarassawadee Ongsakul stated that the Kingdom was established in the 13th Century and, although Buddhism was already the formal religion of this area, a particular form – Lankavamsa Buddhism - expanded into it from the Sukothai area with the arrival of Phra Sumon Tera in 1371- in the reign of King Kue Na (1355-1385). Groups of Lanna Kingdom monks travelled to study in Sri Lanka, many returning with a more expansive knowledge Buddhist beliefs, reflected in their writings and in the adoption of a system of merit-making. (Ongsakul, 2014:28-2) A 12- month merit-making calendar was developed, with a particular event being held in each of the months. Lanna Buddhist arts flourished with religious architecture and the Lanna ceremonial sermon style used in Desana Mahachati (Vessantara Jataka) being just two branches of this.

Vessantara Jataka, or Desana Mahachati, is an historical merit making ceremony commonly held during November to December each year. The word “Mahachati” means the life of Vessantara as Bodhisattva, who was born to make a resolution for the last time to become a Buddha in the next life. Desana Mahachati/ Vessantara Jataka was composed in prose and poetry using old Lanna prosody. It was similar to “Long Cast” but accompanied by changes in tempo and voice to help with the pronunciation, understanding and interest in the Enlightenment of Buddha, which is recited using chanting and melodic voice patterns and story-telling. High and low pitch, short and long sound, loud and soft volume and tempo may all be employed. These changes are unique to the Desana Mahachati, and the preaching style became known as “Rabam Desana” in the Lanna language. The term being used, most typically, by the monks and others involved in the ceremonies. The word “Rabam” can be directly translated as “melody” and the word “Desana” “sermon.” Thus “Rabam Desana” is the Lanna preaching style of the “Desana Mahachati.” There is variation of the Rabam Desana over the geographical area of the old Lanna Kingdom, with differences in vocalizing characteristics having developed over time. The style of sermon may also differ from person to person, with distinctions being noticeable in tempo and tone of voice.

Research of sermon records with musical elements in Lanna Desana Mahachati from the era of Phra Pok Klao Chao Yu Hua (King Rama VII) and the present day showed that there were several types of recital styles representing the various tales of Vessantara Jataka and reflecting the preference of each province in Lanna. Today, Rabam Desana is of interest only to certain groups of Lanna monks, but still plays a subtle role in the lives of the people. This study of the “Rabam Desana” is primarily aimed at examining the current knowledge of Rabam Desana in Lanna, in order to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon, how it has developed, and what it has contribute to local Buddhist wisdom.

## Objectives

To examine the musical and social values of Rabam Desana.

### Conceptual Framework

The preaching of Vessantara Jataka of the story and teaching of the Buddha has existed since the ancient days. The form has been improved, and the voicing developed to show a melodic style and rhythm similar to music. Moreover, small elements have been incorporated into the technical knowledge of preaching that is unique to Lanna, and is called “Rabam Desana.” The knowledge of Rabam Desana serves as the convention for telling the story of Vessantara Jataka by preaching, to make it more interesting, increase personal faith, impress Buddhists with a preaching style that is rhythmic, and encourage new preachers to study more about it. These will all help promote Buddhism, and pass on the teaching of the Buddha in a sustainable way. One approach to promote the understanding of Rabam Desana is through the learning process of ethnomusicology. Another is transcribing the melody and rhythm into the way that Western music is recorded. Both these might help to create more value for the local culture, and serve as a foundation for more advanced study of traditional Lanna music in the future.

### Background

There has been research that included looking at Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style. For instance, the study by Manee Payomyong (Payomyong, 1976:371-372) found that the preaching method used in Desana Mahachati tradition in each region of Thailand, namely the north (Lanna), the northeast, the central, and the south, all exhibit different idioms, preaching styles and characteristics. These are influenced by each province's dialect. However, the stories told are similar in each of these areas. Another study by Phra Kru Adul Sillakit (Sillakit, 2008:a-d) put forward that Vessantara Jataka has been popular in Thailand since the Sukhothai era. Lanna received Lankavamsa Buddhism from Sukhothai, and it prospered in Chiang Mai, which was the center of Lanna Kingdom. Factors that contributed to the popularity of Vessantara Jataka in Lanna included: 1) the composition that incorporates knowledge, wisdom, tradition, convention, and practices that have been carried on in Lanna into the story; 2) the preaching manner using a melodic voice, style, tempo that does not bore the audience and promotes belief in the story; 3) the listening - Rabam Desana has an introductory part that is an insertion of a poem. This poem presents a story or an anecdote that is fun and interesting. Furthermore, a study by Pornprapit Phoasavadi (Phoasavadi, 2016:155-212) which collected data from 2008-2013, for that people in the Lanna society placed importance on Desana Mahachati, and that it comes in two forms in the present time: the traditional annual preaching, and the preaching to prolong life which is found only in Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style. The rhythm and style of the preaching is called Rabam. The study summarized the analysis of Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style stating that: (1) there were various categories of Rabam to exhibit different melody of preaching; (2) preachers were selected based on their voice quality and the appropriateness of their voice for the preaching; (3) phrasing was arranged based on the breathing; (4) the beginning and ending voice was the main voice in the voice group; (5) voice intervals were used; and (6) the preaching rule and order were arranged in a systematic way. Nonetheless, the study has revealed a gap in the information that the researcher may be able to fill for the complete knowledge of Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style. The missing pieces that the

researcher has identified include: 1) the evidence of Desana Mahachati preaching in the Lanna style that is identified in a new resource, 2) the presentation of the main Rabam melody that was found in seven provinces influenced by the Lanna culture, 3) the teaching of the melody in the form of Western music notes, and, 4) current and contemporary state of the preaching in the Lanna style.

### Methodology

The researcher employed the research method of ethnomusicology, studied related research papers, organized field trips to observe the Tang Tham Luang ritual<sup>1</sup> in different regions, and interviewed experts including preachers. Data and information were arranged into categories to be analyzed in terms of general context and knowledge of Rabam Desana. The voice used in the preaching is reflected using the notes of the Western music, and presented to allow descriptive analysis. The methodology is as follows:

The researcher employed the research method of ethnomusicology, studied related research papers, organized field trips to observe the Tang Tham Luang ritual (see Endnote 1.) in different regions, and interviewed experts including preachers. Data and information were arranged into categories to be analyzed in terms of general context and knowledge of Rabam Desana. The voice used in the preaching is reflected using the notes of the Western music, and presented to allow descriptive analysis. The methodology is as follows:

- Preparation before the field trips: The researcher studied documents, research work, and videos of Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style from related websites, with the approval of the research ethics in human subject (Certificate of MU-SSIRB Approval) from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Sciences, Mahidol University.
- Selection of study areas: The researcher selected some study areas for the field trips using purposive sampling. Seven provinces in the upper northern region of Thailand were selected, namely Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Lamphun, Lampang, Phayao, Phrae, and Nan. These areas demonstrated existing knowledge of Rabam Desana.
- Population and sample groups included current and former monks and others with the history of using Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style. The sample groups were constructed using purposive sampling and snow ball sampling. There were two sample groups: 1) key informants, who were those that could provide a general context of it; and 2) casual informants, who offered in-depth knowledge of these melodies.
- Tools used in data collection included: 1) a questionnaire for primary information to collect basic data available in the study areas, and general context; 2) an in-depth interview to gather knowledge of the melodies; and 3) a photo and voice recording tool, a voice editing program, and musical instruments to help transcribe the preaching and translate it to Western music notes.
- Data collection: The researcher specified the data collection period from October 2016 to January 2018. The process was as follows: 1) Primary data collection, which is divided into two parts: 1.1) the study of documents, books,

and academic journals from the library and the online database; and 1.2) the interview of people who could provide in-depth information on the general context of it. 2) Data collection from field trips that followed the primary data collection. Data in this process was obtained from the interview of experts and monks, and from the researcher participating in it in different areas. The researcher applied to joined a training course on how to use it together with monks in Chiang Mai. This was to gain a better understanding; and 3) The voice recording of Rabam Desana for analysis. Recordings were made of the entire ceremony during the field trips, and of the interview of monks to demonstrate some sections of the it in a formal way.

- Data analysis was performed on all the collected data: The researcher categorized and arranged information based the geographical area and the knowledge of the melodies that were found, particularly information on the preaching voice. The researcher analyzed the information using perceptive listening, then arranged it in order of appearance in the ceremony. After that, the researcher transcribed the melodies into Western music notes with the “fixed do” technique, and reproduced the words phonetically.
- Presentation of the analysis results using descriptive analysis, together with sample of pictures, music notes, and various symbols.

### Origins and Results

“Rabam” is old Lanna word directly translated to mean rhythm and melody. “Desana” means giving a sermon. When used together they have a specific meaning for those involved in the relating of Lanna Desana Mahachati, Rabam Desana refers to the melody of sections of the story of the Buddha’s Enlightenment. This incorporates the traditional pattern of pronunciation of the Lanna voice and its language, or “kam meuang” the filler word “Ue” to complete the rhythm. Voice techniques are also used, namely chest voice (symbolized by a normal musical note ), falsetto (symbolized by ) and vibrato (symbolized by ). Monks with proficient skills may choose to adjust their telling of Rabam Desana to sound more sophisticated and exceptional.

The tradition of Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style was believed to have originated in ancient times. Although there was no clear evidence for it, the study of Prakong Nimmanhemin (Nimmanhemin, 1983), Manee Payomyong (Payomyong, 1976), and Phra Kru Adul Silakit (Silakit, 2008), reinforced its antiquity. The support for this research was found in a recording of it by a monk in Chiang Mai. (make in approximately 1930)

The knowledge of the melodies of Rabam Desana can be broken down into smaller elements that can be analyzed using Western music theory. Each melodic section is given the name of something from nature that reflects the tempo and tone. For example, Manao long khong is the lime that is floating on the water and this reflects the bouncing rhythm of that section. Details about the sections are presented later in the article.

### **Old Voice Records and Lanna Rabam Desana**

From the study of documents and an old voice record of Poonpit Amatyakul (Amatyakul, 2018), photographic evidence of a vinyl record of the Nakhon Kaan, (Figure 1) the last section of the Desana Mahachati was found. It indicated the monk heard on this was “Phra Kru Khum Tan” from Chiang Mai. Further examination revealed that Phra Kru Khum Tan, (1907-2001), a former abbot of Wat Sansailuang in Chiang Mai, was a Lanna Desana Mahachati monk who was known for his particular style, voice, and pattern, was a role model for later generations of monks. He was particularly recognized from his preaching of the 13th section, Nakhon Kaan, in the voice record produced in the King Rama VII era (1925-1935). Poonpit Amatyakul commented that:

In the reign of King Rama VII, monks were invited from Chiang Mai (Lanna) to preach at the kathin festival at Wat Benchamabophit every year. Each year, the preaching was different. This was to let people with titles of Khun Ying and Jao Jom, and their descendants in Chiang Mai, who had come to live in the royal court since the King Rama V era, make offering of items from the North (Lanna) to the monks. At night, sermons were preached by monks from the North (Phra Kru Khum Tan). The preaching was highly admired by Jao Jom, Jao Dara Rasmi, as well as others with Jao Jom title. They conveyed this to Mr. Chai Bumrungpong, the owner of Ratanamala, a licensed recording company from England that produced records with the trademark His Master's Voice, or the dog logo. Phra Kru Khum Tan was invited to have his sermons recorded after the preaching for Jao Jom.



Figure 1. Cover of Desana Mahachati a vinyl Record from Poonpit Amatyakul (Author's photo, 2018).

In the interview of Phra Kru Sangaborihan, the abbot of Wat Sansailuang (Sangaborihan 2016), he said that

Phra Kru Khum Tan was often invited to Bangkok to preach Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style to Northern people who resided in Bangkok, regularly, every year. Phra Kru Khum Tan always stayed at Wat Benchamabophit in Bangkok.

In addition, the analysis of Phra Kru Khum Tan's recording found that his voice expression was stylish. He used word stress, loud voice, short and abrupt voice, recitative, and high-low notes that coincided with the melody of the local language, along with a few other techniques. As such, the Rabam Desana of Phra Kru Khum Tan was commonly recognized among preachers in Chiang Mai. As having a style that was melodious, unusual, distinct and become known locally as "Rabam Mataikanna." "Mataikanna" can be translated as how the dog walks along the dykes of the rice paddies, in other words it is of even and strong tempo with vocal Grace notes. This can be seen in the excerpt below:

**Phra Kru Khum Tan**

ya tha wai kon na chan phra chao wa  
 tong tong nok ton chok chok haeng sap pa pong keng haeng khwam mai thang muan  
 ma chai pai thang khong kho rong heng tan thao kham khwam cham wai

Figure 2. Melody of Rabam Mataikanna by Phra Kru Khum Tan (Author's transcript, 2018).

Although in the present time "Rabam Mataikanna" is commonly referred to by monks, it is considered to be a temporary cultural phenomenon that stimulated a new generation. However, what is considered to be the main melody of the Lanna Rabam Desana is still audible in it. Though the research material is limited it is still worthy of research today.

#### *Knowledge of Melodies of Lanna Rabam Desana*

Many types of melody of Rabam Desana have been created over time. Of these, six types of melody are regarded as the exemplars and continue to be used widely in Northern Thailand. They are: 1) Manao long khong, 2) Prao kwai bai, 3) Nam tok tad, 4) Mangpu chom duang, 5) Nok khao hern, and 6) Chang kham tong. These types of melody can be used to preach any section that has the tradition of Rabam Desana. These melodic sections have the names Kaan Chuchok, Kaan Kumaan-baan, Kaan Matsi, Kaan Mahaaraat, Kaan Chaukrasat, and Nakhon kaan. Sections that do not have the tradition of Rabam Desana are preached only in normal speech. Though there are 13 sections of Vessantara Jakata only six use Rabam Desana. To tell the whole story in melodic style would take more than 13 hours, so seven sections are recited in plain voice for the purposes of brevity. The Rabam Desana sections contain the main messages and action of the story and benefit from melodic presentation.

The decision whether to use a specific type of melody for a section was made with consideration to the story in that particular section, since this dictated how the

monk would pronounce and chant words. Some types of melody are 72-96 times in one minute (Andante), such as Nam tok tad and Chang kham tong, which are more suitable for a story that describes a town or a forest, or a story told in the Pali language (that of the original story brought back to Lanna by the monks from Sri Lanka). In contrast, slow tempo types of melody, such as Prao kwai bai, Mangpu chom duang, and Nok khao hern, contain more chanting, thus are suitable for a story that describes sorrow and misery. Therefore, monks have a chance to demonstrate their skills by selecting appropriate techniques to use. Importantly, they must use breathing control to pause whilst preaching.

Next, the understanding of the story is another crucial point. Phrases used are pieces of writing from Vessantara Jataka. These come in many versions, but the main content is the same, and is divided into 13 Kaans (sections). Like Desana Mahachati in other regions of Thailand, that in Lanna Desana Mahachati has existed in different versions in the past, such as the Mahachati Jata Pakaew Muangfang version (1830). However, the main story preached today is the one that Phra Thammarachanuwat (Fu Attasiwo, 1901-1973) translated from the Lanna language to the Thai language, and named the Soisungkorn version. Phrases of this have been constantly adapted, generating many later versions, such as the Paijae Riewdang, Soipraw, and Phraya Peun versions. Which version to use depends on the monk's chosen way to teach dharma, using Rabam Desana and adding vernacular words and adding personal style.

In addition, the study found that there are four components of Rabam Desana, which are: 1) ue pattern, 2) poem pattern 3) namo pattern, and 4) dharma pattern. However, each section of Rabam Desana may or may not contain all the four components, as illustrated in the table below.

Rabam Desana	Components of Rabam Desana			
	Ue pattern	Poem pattern	Namo pattern	Dharma pattern (story-telling)
Manao long khong	✓	✓	✓	✓
Prao kwai bai	✗	✓	✓	✓
Nam tok tad	✗	✗	✓	✓
Mangpu chom duang	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nok khao hern	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chang kham tong	✓	✗	✓	✓

✗ = Used ✓ = Not used

Figure 3. Different types of pattern of Rabam Desana in order of their position in the sermon.

Components of Rabam Desana are ue, poem, namo, and dharma pattern. Some types of melody do not contain all these four components. From Figure 3, Prao kwai bai and Nam tok tad it can be seen to not employ Ue pattern. Likewise, Nam

tok tad, Nok khao hern, and Chang kham tong do not use poem. Interestingly, only Manao long khong and Mangpu chom duang display all the four patterns of Rabam Desana. These are further explored below.

1. ‘Ue pattern’ Ue is wordless vocalization - a sound made by the singer to fill a gap. More specifically, it is when the singer produces the Ue sound for a long duration and that in a smooth, rhythmic, and melodic manner. An example of this is in Mangpu chom duang. Ue is pronounced either as a long or as a short sentence, but always smooth and connected in style. It’s may be used to mark the alternation between the use of Pali or northern Thai words. In this Mangpu chom duang, Vibrato is added to the sound to vibrate certain words to reference the vibration of the wings of mangpu (a big bee) when it flies from flower to flower.

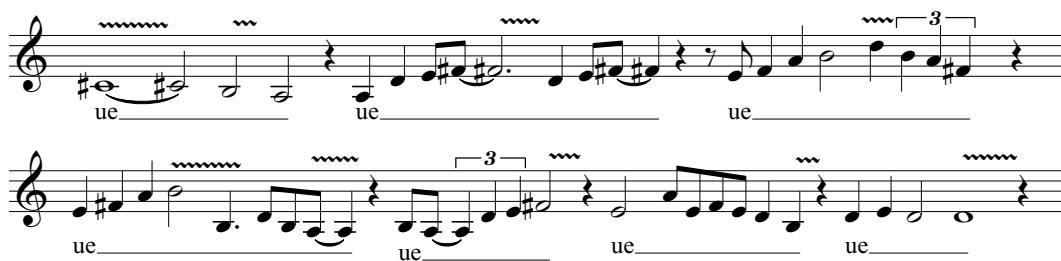


Figure 4. Chanting “Ue” throughout the pattern in Mangpu chom duang Voice by Phra Poomipat Tanasampanno, Lampang (Author’s transcript, 2017).

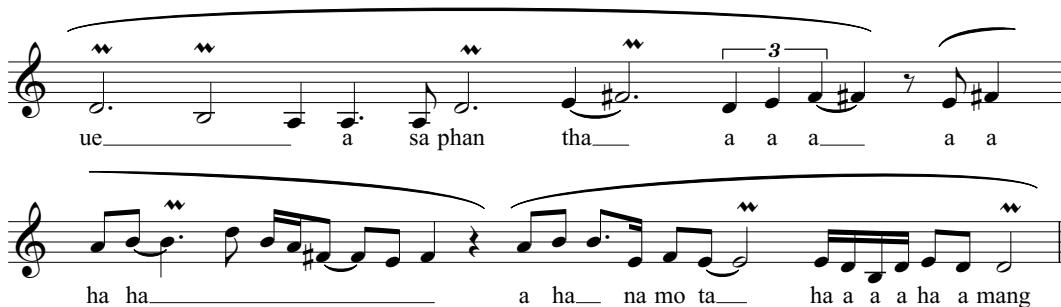


Figure 5. Alternating between ‘Ue’ and a Pali spell in Mangpu chom duang Voice by Phra Poomipat Tanasampanno, Lampang (Author’s transcript, 2017).

2. ‘Poem pattern’ The monk may insert tales to support and enhance the story of that particular section. These tales are called ‘poems.’ The poem’s melody and rhythm are one that is constructed with the pronunciation of the local dialect, and chanting filler words. This employs techniques such as chest voice, falsetto, and vibrato in positions that are in keeping with the practice of Rabam Desana. The following example depicts one entitled “Kap Pimpa” to preach Kaan Kumaan-baan or Kaan Matsi.



Figure 6. "Kap Pimpa" inserted in Kaan Kumaanbaan or Kaan Matsi Voice by Professor Chusak Pegtong, Phrae (Author's transcript, 2017).

3. 'Namo pattern' This is in the Pali language and recalls the memory of the Buddha, with the phrase 'na mo tat sa pha kha wa to ara ha to sam masam phut tha sa,' which is typically used to begin any Buddhist religious ceremony. Desana Mahachati, therefore, begins with this phrase said in the specific melody of Rabam Desana. It is said only once, except in Nok khao hern, where it is repeated three times at the beginning.



Figure 7. Voice of namo pattern in Prao kwai bai by Phra Baidika Channarong Chontasaro, Chiang Mai (Author's transcript, 2016).



Figure 8. Voice of namo pattern in Mangpu chom duang by Phra Poomipat Tanasampanno, Lampang (Author's transcript, 2017).

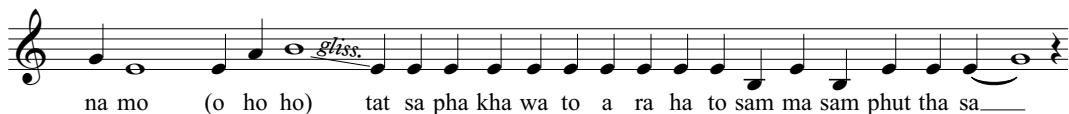


Figure 9. Voice of namo pattern in Nok khao hern by Professor Chusak Pegtong, Phrae (Author's transcript, 2017).

4. 'Dharma pattern' This particular type of pattern and melody employs chest voice, falsetto, vibrato, and filler words, as seen in the following example.

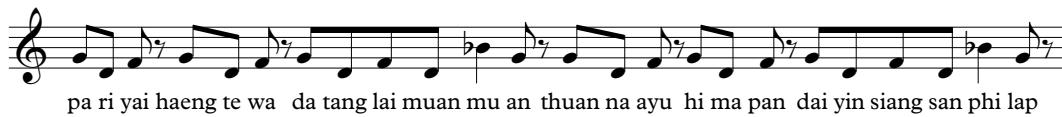


Figure 10. Conducting dharma pattern using Chang kham tong in Kaan Matsi Voice by Phra Maha Narongsak Suwannakit, Nan (Author's transcript, 2017).

The analysis based on perceptive listening, along with the transcription of Rabam Desana into Western music, established that it could be analyzed and then constructed to form a unique musical attribute. The researcher presents different types of Rabam Desana below.

#### ***Musical Characteristics of Rabam Desana***

In the musical perspective, the presentation of Rabam Desana moves in multiple ranges, from high to low pitch, and short to long tempo, whilst also exhibiting the beat. These are musical characteristics. The researcher analyzed these characteristics in each type of melody, and summarized them in the table below.

No.	Type of melody of Rabam Desana	Pivotal Pitch	Tempo	Range
		Pivotal Pitch/ 2 <sup>nd</sup> pivotal pitch/ ending pitch		
1	Manao long khong	G4, E4, F4/ C4, C5/ G4 C4 D4	72-102	C4-C5
2	Prao kwai bai	A4, D5, E5/ E4, G4/C5 G5	48-72	E4 – G5
3	Nam tok tad	G4/ A4/ G4	76-92	C4-C5
4	Mangpu chom duang	D4, F#4, A4, A5/ B3, A3/ D4, A5, D5	58-102	B3-D5
5	Nok khao hern	G4, Bb4/ D4, F4, Eb5/ F4, G4	48-86	D4 – Eb5
6	Chang kham tong	F4, Ab4/ G4, D4, Eb5/ Ab4, F4	72-96	D4 – Eb5

Figure 11. Overview of Musical Characteristics of Rabam Desana.

As Figure 11 demonstrates, each type of melody of Rabam Desana has its own type of pivotal pitch, which differs from others. The analysis presented in this section was created with the transcription of it into Western music notes. It was found that the voice could be assigned to music notes close or similar to those of Western music. Nonetheless, when the note frequency was considered, there was still some inaccuracy or inconsistency, which was due to the fact that prior to starting the section, the monk's voice wasn't guided by the musical key or tone of any instruments. As such, the monk memorized the tones by himself, so there is some individual variation. This is different from singing a local song that is led by instruments or other singers where they are able to listen to the different tones and adjust and compare their voice to them. In the researcher's perspective, the main difference among types of melody of Rabam Desana is because it is related in Northern Thai language. This has grammar and pronunciation that are notice-

ably unique to Lanna. This includes its alphabet, vowels, and intonation. In addition to this, although the North Thai dialect is generally used to communicate throughout Lanna, each province has its own dialect distinct from other provinces. These provincial dialects construct their own variations of Rabam Desana.

Prao kwai bai is a type of melody widely used in Chiang Mai and Lamphun. The tempo is relatively slow, and moves in wider range than other types. Prao kwai bai is typically used with poem pattern of Kaan Matsi and Kaan Kumaanbaan, because of its slow chanting, wide voice range, and ability to convey the sadness and disappointment of that section of the story. Nok khao hern is a type popular in Phrae, and highly regarded for its melodious quality. Chang kham tong melody is popular in Nan. It employs five notes, commonly used in Asia. Manao long khong usually employs the dharma pattern to tell the story. The rhythmic range is quite narrow. Interviews with a number of monks suggested that it is the oldest type of melody, believed to have originated in the Chiang Saen era (about 1328). Later wars forced people to move from Chiang Saen throughout Lanna, spreading their different styles of Desana Mahachati. One example of this is that Manao long khong is at times heard within the story-telling of Mangpu chom duang.

#### *Association between Sections and Rhythm of Rabam Desana*

The essence of Desana Mahachati is the life story of Vessantara Jakata. The story is divided into 13 sections, or Kaans. Every section presents a different part of the life story, with an individual atmospheric mood to it. The researcher observed what was used in each section /Kaan, and their association to each other in the context of use of Rabam Desana. This is demonstrated in the following table.

Kaan	Section	Preacher's Voice	Type of melody of Rabam Desana
1	Thotsaphorn	No specification	No use of Rabam Desana
2	Himaphaan	No specification	No use of Rabam Desana
3	Thaanakan	No specification	No use of Rabam Desana
4	Vannaphravet	No specification	No use of Rabam Desana
5	Chuchok	Usually chest voice	Manao long khong, Nam tok tad, Chang kham tong
6	Julaphon	No specification	No use of Rabam Desana
7	Mahaaphorn	No specification	No use of Rabam Desana
8	Kumaanbaan	Usually falsetto / head voice	Prao kwai bai, Nok khao hern, Mangpu chom duang
9	Matsi	Usually small voice similar to a female's / head voice	Prao kwai bai, Nok khao hern, Mangpu chom duang
10	Sakkabap	No specification	No use of Rabam Desana
11	Mahaaraat	Usually strong voice / chest voice	Prao kwai bai, Nok khao hern, Mangpu chom duang
12	Chaukrasat	Usually voice of a child, preached by novices	Manao long khong, Nam tok tad, Chang kham tong
13	Nakhon kaan	Usually strong echoing voice	Manao long khong, Nam tok tad, Chang kham tong

Figure 12. Sections of Desana Mahachati with Voices and Types of melody Commonly Used.

As previously stated, there were many types of melody of Rabam Desana, which originated in each province. They were called “Rabam of the town.” The researcher found that Chiang Mai and Lamphun typically used Prao kwai bai and Nam tok tad, while Chiang Rai and Phayao preferred Manao long khong. Lampang practiced Mangpu chom duang. Nok khao hern is widely used in Phrae whereas Chang kham tong is more commonly used in Nan, respectively.

Today, Desana Mahachati ritual in the Lanna style are arranged by temples and villagers in an area, who invite monks from other regions to attend these events. This reflects not only the people's strong Buddhist faith, but also promotes cultural diffusion and trans-cultural linkages. Different types of melody of Rabam Desana have been exchanged widely in Lanna. This is why present day Desana Mahachati ritual employ more diverse types of Rabam Desana.

From field observation in each area, the researcher found that Rabam Desana was used in only six of 13 sections of Desana Mahachati. As the story told in Desana Mahachati is that of Vessantara Jataka used to teach dharma, the story is structured in sections, or Kaans. There are 13 Kaans altogether. Each Kaan is based on the previous Kaan, and links to the next one. Some Kaans recount simple stories, some present more exciting events. Others relate sad and tales of grief. The use of different types of melody, especially in Kaans that appeal to the emotions, largely help the audience comprehend the feeling and atmosphere. Kaan Matsi is popular among the audience. This one describes the sorrow of Matsi, Vessantara's wife, who has lost her two children to Chuchok. (A hermit who, on meeting with the Vessantara asked for his two children to be given to him as his servants. This was agreed but this loss caused Matsi much unhappiness, Kaan Matsi) This is a good example of how Rabam Desana convey moods and feelings to the audience as well as teaching dharma.

### Discussion

“Rabam Desana” creates cultural values, establishes connections between laymen and temples, and promotes a positive attitude towards Buddhism. To make it more interesting, the use of different techniques and styles, pronunciation in local dialects, mixed in with singing in a sophisticated melody, were all used. These coincide with the practices by lay Lanna singers that help pass on the meaning of the songs for the audience to enjoy. A field trip by the researcher on November 21, 2016, (at Wat Ban Mon, Sankumpang, Chiang Mai) saw him observe that, during the preaching in Kaan Chuchok, the monk described the look and personality of Chuchok with the style and melody well-recognized to be of the Lanna culture. That made the storytelling more fun and enjoyable for the audience.

At present, Rabam Desana barely plays a role in promoting its knowledge among the general audience, or laymen, since there has never been a real effort to promote this branch of knowledge to them. In fact, knowledge of it and its history is embodied in individuals, not in written documents. It has been passed down only by “oral tradition.” This resulted in the knowledge of Rabam Desana becoming entrusted to preachers only, while laymen play the part of the audience. In recent times, monks (of the new generation) are eager to learn, and place importance on components of different types of melody and rhythm, and how to apply them to the traditional Lanna style Rabam Desana. Their interest is also supported by Buddhist institutions in the area. As part of the study, the researcher explored the course on Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style that was held in Chiang Mai. The same 40-50 monks attended the course, who had attended in the previous years. This was based on their interest to learn more about the skills to properly preach

Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style. They constantly quoted three reasons for this interest, which were: 1) that preaching with Rabam Desana rhythm is melodious, thus they would like to learn and use it; 2) they wished to preserve it and its history and pass it on; and 3) if they are equipped with the ability to preach in Rabam Desana Lanna, they will become recognized as famous monks and invited to preach at temples and other places.



Figure 13. Course on Desana Mahachati in the Lanna style in Wat Thung Muen Noi in Chiang Mai (Author's photo, 2016).

The melodies of Rabam Desana is likely to be included more widely in sermons of monks in many places. The researcher predicts there will be cultural change and development in the Lanna Desana Mahachati community. Firstly, that knowledge of Rabam Desana melody will be developed in two main branches. The first branch is composed of monks who have been educated by traditional teachers. These are monks with sophisticated skills, and have the ability to explain how to methodically adopt the melody and pattern. They are commonly well accepted in the preaching community. The second branch is made up of self-taught monks who did not study preaching methods. They imitate the technique that incorporates the melody/rhythm, and often blend several types of them together. As such, they are less likely to be accepted by other monks. Secondly, the movement of monks and novices to big cities affects the study of Rabam Desana that is traditional in those places. Thirdly, how local dialects are pronounced and developed will continue to impact Rabam Desana.

Nevertheless, Rabam Desana maintains its crucial role in conveying the meaning and displaying the identity of each cultural area. A monk may preach as though using a musical instrument, helping the audience feel the right mood for that story, feel the rhythm, the melodious quality, absorb the atmosphere, and pay attention to the dharma content. The laymen thus come to understand the lessons covered in Mahachati teachings. For that reason, Kaans told with the correct, melodious rhythm of Rabam Desana help build “precept, concentration, and wisdom” within the audience, which are dharma principles in Buddhism. Moreover, as a

means of verbal communication, Rabam Desana generates thoughts, ideas, and feelings in the audience. The audience is impressed when they hear the sermons, and is interested in hearing them again. This process encourages Buddhists to attend religious teachings and dharma lessons, and to continue to arrange religious ceremonies and festivals to protect and preserve these practices for the future.

### Conclusion

Historically, the collective knowledge and use of Rabam Desana when retelling the Desana Mahachati was generated and practiced by Lanna monks. It is a way to vocalize verses that contain worldly as well as spiritual content, and was used in some stories in the 13 sections of Vessantara Jataka. Two styles are used to preach these 13 sections: normal story-the spoken voice for seven sections, and Rabam Desana melodic voice for the other six sections. The six types of melody for the six sections are: Manao long khong, Prao kwai bai, Nam tok tad, Nok khao hern, Mangpu chom duang, and Chang kham tong. Desana Mahachati events are usually held at the end of Buddhist Lent, with monks recounting the stories incorporating dharma content. In the past, it was simply story-telling, with no complex pronunciation techniques. Later, the story was decorated with techniques to make the voice more sophisticated and to show feelings through the tone, the pivotal pitch, and the melodies. As such, the audiences are more interested and pay greater attention to the meaning of it. Also, the right mood and feelings are established that help the audience of worshippers imagine the stories more vividly. As such, Rabam Desana Lanna has come to be well-known and widely appreciated by local people in the North of Thailand.

Components of Rabam Desana are Eu pattern, poem pattern, namo pattern, and dharma pattern. These components are contained in several parts of the sections of Desana Mahachati. To apply which technique of Rabam Desana in which part primarily depends on the practice taught by teachers and passed on by many generations. Monks, however, may add specific changes to the technique of Rabam Desana as they see appropriate. This consequently creates a number of preachers with distinct preaching styles. Rabam Desana becomes a musical melody that may be developed with creativity and imagination of monks, and serves as a musical instrument to touch the sentiment of the audience. As the audience pays attention to the dharma content, they better understand the teachings embedded naturally in Vessantara Jataka.

The role of temples in uplifting Buddhism, carrying on the tradition, and communicating dharma to Buddhists is an important duty continued up to the present day. The form of communication that temples use with Buddhists in ceremonies places importance on religious teachings, or Desana Mahachati. They believe that Desana Mahachati, told by monks with skillful preaching ability, can persuade Buddhists to practice dharma at the temple.

### Recommendations

Based on the study, the researcher proposed a few recommendations for organizations and individuals in Buddhism. To begin with, temples that host Desana Mahachati should disseminate any knowledge they have of Desana Mahachati in

the Lanna style as this will pass on the value of the ability to preach in Desana Mahachati melody by skilled and knowledgeable monks. Also, this creates an opportunity for a new generation of monks to learn and develop their skills.

Apart from Buddhist organizations and individuals, the public sector should take part in promoting Buddhism. That is, they should host substantial forums on Desana Mahachati with the original melody in order to expand the existing knowledge to the general public, and promote exchange of information among monks and novices. This would help preserve and invite further development of it in each area or temple. In addition, government agencies that are responsible for protecting and preserving the Desana Mahachati must adopt, and adapt to, new technology that deals with knowledge exchange and sharing. For instance, they may transfer musical notes of Rabam Desana melody to a voice software system to store knowledge and promote learning of different types of Rabam Desana in a more modern fashion.

### Endnotes

- 1 'Tang Thom Luang' is one of the major occasions of the Buddhist year. Nowadays it is a two-day event, held by an individual temple and the people local to it, and held in the second month of the Lunar year. It usually centers around the recounting of the 13 Kaans that make up the story of the life of Bodhisattva in his last incarnation before 'Enlightenment'-- the Vessantara Jataka. Occasionally a different long sermon theme is chosen to be recounted, but this is rare.

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