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“Glong-Pheln”: A Belief in the North-East Culture in Thailand and the Drumming Techniques¹

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Abstract

This research applied the qualitative approach and employed ethnomusicology as the principle of drumming. The aims of the study were (1) to study the roles and functions of "Glong-Pheln" and (2) to study the distinctive features of the drum beating techniques of "Glong-Pheln". This research select the sample group by choosing 1 temple from each of the 20 provinces in the North-East of Thailand. The results were as follows: Glong Pheln, a large two-sided drum in the North-East, was used in the temple to tell the time, a function similar to that of a clock, in the morning, late afternoon and early evening or on special occasions such as to signal a meeting or a bad incident. In addition, the drum was used as a signal to tell travelers or people who had lost their ways that there was a community nearby. For the drumming techniques, have 4 pattern 1) "Glong Pheln" 2) "Glong Laeng" 3) "Glong Ruam" 4) "Glong Deuk" the drum could be beaten at long or short intervals, and could be played solo or accompanied by a big gong depending on the occasions.

Keywords: Glong Pheln, North-East of Thailand

1. Introduction

"Glong" (Drum) is an ancient instrument used in the Suvarnabhumi area since the old days. Drums have had important roles and functions in the Suvarnabhumi society and have been used for different purposes. The drums found in this area are made of bronze and of wood covered with leather. Their functions vary according to their different roles and statuses and the assignment of roles by the authorities at different periods. On one hand, drums are used in ceremonies to convey the impression of sacredness. On the other hand, they take part in entertainment, signal-sending, and morale-boosting before battles.

"Glong" is an instrument for beating that has long been an integral part of the ways of life of people in the Thai society. Drums constitute the rhythmic section of a band and are played to accompany

performances and ceremonies. They can be divided into several types such as “Glong Khaek”, “Glong Tat”, “Glong Yao”, “Glong Mangkla”, etc. They are played as part of a band in performances and ceremonies such as dowry processions and religious events. Their popularity in processions is possibly due to their convenient mobility, loud noises and lively style suitable to entertaining occasions.

The functions of drums from the past up to the present time as recorded in various literary works can be summarized as follows:

1. To convey signals such as attack signals during a battle, warning signals in a community, etc.
2. To serve as entertainment
3. To celebrate victory
4. To provide a good time

The drums in the Suvarnabhumi society have undergone various physical modifications as a result of external influences and factors as well as the values and creativity of the people in the society. The art of performing – singing, dancing and playing music – has closely been bonded with the ways of life of the people and has been valued and passed on from one generation to the next.

“Glong Pheln” in the North-East of Thailand is an instrument used to convey signals. It is usually found in a temple – the community centre where people gather for important community activities. In each temple of a village in the North-East, “Hor Glong” (Drum Tower) is built to shelter the drum, to keep it and to go to when drum signals are needed.

From the above reasons, the researchers were interested in studying “Glong Pheln” found in temples. The study focused on provincial temples, called the central temples, of the provinces in the North-East of Thailand as sources of the information about “Glong Pheln”. The topic of the study was about the beliefs related to “Glong Pheln”. The data were also collected to reveal the physical features such as the shape and size of “Glong Pheln”, the making and the beating of “Glong Pheln” in order to serve as information on the local wisdom in art and culture of the communities in the North-East.

2. Objectives

To study “Glong Pheln” in various aspects such as its physical structure and its making in the I-san culture, and to study the methods of drumming on various occasions.

3. Research Methodology

The study employed the fieldwork data collection based on the qualitative research methodology, in the following steps:

1. Select the sample group by choosing 1 temple from each of the 20 provinces in the North-East of Thailand. The selected temples were the central temple of each province.

2. Design the research instruments to collect the data: the interview form, the questionnaire and the form for recording the physical structure.

3. Conduct a fieldwork study to collect the data in the forms of photographs, videos, and interviews with related people such as monks, masters of religious ceremonies, community members, etc.

4. Categorize, print out and analyze the data using the principles of ethnomusicology and focusing primarily on the data from the fieldwork.

4. Results

“Glong” is pronounced in the I-san dialect as “Gong”, without the “L” sound. “Glong” signals are influential within the monastic area. They are used to send the following messages:

-The drum signal at 4.00 in the morning, called “Tee Gong Derk”, tells the laypeople to get up and prepare steamed rice to offer to the monks, and tells the monks to prepare for the morning prayer.

-The drum signal in the late morning, called “Tee Gong Home”, calls for a meeting.

-The drum signal at 11.00 in the morning, called “Tee Gong Pheln”, tells the laypeople to offer lunch to the monks.

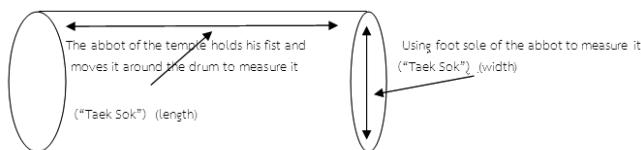
-The drum signal at 4.00 in the afternoon, called “Tee Gong Laeng”, tells the farmers to complete their evening farming and prepare to go home.

-The drum signal at twilight, called “Tee Gong Home”, calls for a gathering at the temple. Sometimes, laypeople and young male and female adults are called upon to help mow the lawn in the temple, or a meeting with government officers is being held at the temple. (Phadet Yothaphon, 3 May 2014, Interview)

Occasionally, drum signals are used to tell the travelers or passers-by that a community is nearby. When people who collect wild items in the forest find themselves lost, they rely on the drum signals to lead them home.

5. The Making of the Drums

“Glong” (Drum) is made of a big log such as Makha wood, Mahad wood, or a big tamarind tree. When the wood has been selected, it will be dug out, a process called “Khud Glong” or “Sian Glong”. After the wood is acquired, a ritual called “Taek Sok” must first be performed. The word “Sok”, derived from the word “Chalok”, means “Good”. “Taek” is an I-san dialect meaning “Measurement”. “Taek Sok”, therefore, means “Measurement to find a good location.” Villagers believe that a drum must have “Sok” or a “Good” quality in order to bring about peace and happiness. If a drum lacks “Sok”, it is accursed and will only bring bad luck to the temple: deserted temples, quarrelsome monks, discords between laypeople and monks, or sexual affairs between a monk and a woman.



**Using rope before use fist and foot sole

The length of the drum is measured using a rope. Then, the abbot of the temple holds his fist and moves it around the drum to measure it (“Taek Sok”) while reciting the “Sok Glong” verse: 1. “Nan Tha Pe Ree” 2. “Sri Chom Cheun” 3. “Heun Muang Phrom” 4. “Som Yoo Sang” 5. “Mang Sang Kho” 6. “Pho Thi Sat” 7. “Wat Phra Chao”. The recitation should finish at an auspicious part of the verse (“Teuk Sok Dee”). The meaning of the “Sok Gong” verse can be explained as follows:

1. “Nan Tha Pe Ree” means: Good; commanding admiration, delight and respect from others
2. “Sri Chom Cheun” means: Good; happy and peaceful meditation among monks and laypeople
3. “Heun Muang Phrom” means: Good; commanding admiration and respect not only from humans in the human world, but also from angels in heaven.
4. “Som Yoo Sang” means: Good; harmonious relationship among the monks in the temple and successful operation.
5. “Mang Sang Kho” means: Bad; an accursed drum will destroy the harmony among the monks.
6. “Pho Thi Sat” and “Wat Phra Chao” have the same meaning – that the temple will be deserted, and that only Lord Buddha will remain to protect the temple.

For the keeping of the drum, in most cases, a drum tower is constructed to house the drum, depending on the income and the faith of the laypeople in the area. The heights of the tower vary from one storey to two storeys or to three storeys. Where there is no drum tower, stands are built to carry the drum.



Figure 1 : “Gleng Pheln” at “Wat Phisarn-Hiranyawart”
Nongbualamphoo District

From figure 1 shown the “Gleng Pheln” don’t have “Hor Glong” (The tower for keeping Glong)



Figure 2 : “Glong Pheln” at “Wat Apisit” Mahasakham District
From figure 2 shown the “Hor Glong” have one floor.



Figure 3 : “Glong Pheln” at “Wat Klang” Buengkarn District
From figure 3 shown the “Hor Glong” have two floor.



Figure 4 : “Glong Pheln” at “Wat Phochai” Nongkhai District
From figure 4 shown the “Hor Glong” have three floor.

The time of drumming “Glong Pheln”

This research select the sample group by choosing 1 temple from each of the 20 provinces in the North-East of Thailand. The selected temples were the central temple of each province. Are follow as:

1. Wat Glang at Kalasin District
2. Wat Glang at Khon-kean District
3. Wat Songsila at Chaiyaphoom District
4. Wat Glang at Nakornphanom District
5. Wat Phanaraimaharath at Nakornrachasrima
6. Wat Glang at Buriram District
7. Wat Glang at Buengkarn District
8. Wat Apisit at Mahasarakham Didtrict
9. Wat Srimongkoltai at Mukdaharn District
10. Wat Mahathat at Yasothon District
11. Wat Glang Mingmuang at Roi-Et District
12. Wat Luang Sumangklaram
13. Wat Phathatchengchum at Sakornnakorn District
14. Wat Burapharam at Surin District
15. Wat Phochai at Nongkhai District
16. Wat Phisarnhiranyawart at Nongbualamphoo

17. Wat Phothisomphorn at Udon Thani District
18. Wat Glang Ubonrachathani District
19. Wat Samranniwet at Aumnatchareon District
20. Wat Srisuthawart at Loie District

In conclusion, the characteristics of drumming “Glong Pheln” in the temples in this study are as follows:

“Glong Pheln” is drummed 4 times a day:

1. “Glong Pheln” at 10.55 or 11.00 a.m.
2. “Glong Laeng” at 16.00
3. “Glong Ruam” at 19.00
4. “Glong Deuk” at 04.00 a.m.

The purposes for drumming are:

1. To tell the laypeople to prepare food to offer to the monks at 11.00 a.m.

2. To tell the people that it is approaching twilight. This is because in the past, there was no clock, and people relied on the drum signals to tell them the time.

3. To call for a gathering on a religious day or when there is an incident of which the people should be informed such as a “Wien Tian” activity, a lunar eclipse, the death of a monk, etc. The drum signals can be sent for this purpose at any time of the day.

4. To tell the monks to attend the morning prayer and to tell the people to prepare to cook. Nowadays, some temples, especially those in the city, have given up drumming for this purpose because it is regarded as a nuisance to the people. Drum signals are important. When people hear the drum, they go to the temple to see what has happened. At present, it is a pity that “Glong Peln” has been replaced by other items. From the interviews, some temples are now using a bell because it gives a longer and more echoing sound. Some use the sound of “Mong”, and some use the sound of electronic bell (for example, in Chaiyaphoom). In some temples, the monks just look at the clock and perform the routine according to the time on the clock.

The Rhythm for Drumming

Form 1 For adverse events. Called “Rua”

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To tell the people that it is adverse events. This form must play 3 times

Form 2 For “Baddish Day” play 3 times

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To call for a gathering on a religious day or when there is an incident of which the people should be informed such as a “Wien Tian” activity, a lunar eclipse, the death of a monk, etc. The drum signals can be sent for this purpose at any time of the day.

Form 3 For “Lunch”

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To tell the laypeople to prepare food to offer to the monks at 11.00 a.m.

Form 4 Called “Glong Deuk”

Glong Phlen	---	---	x	---	x	---	x	---	x	---	x	---	x
Klong Mong	---	---	---	---	mong	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	mong

To tell the monks to attend the Morning Prayer and to tell the people to prepare to cook.

Form 5 Called “Glong Lang”

Glong Phlen	---	---	x	---	x
Klong Mong	---	---	mong	---	mong

To tell the people that it is approaching twilight. This is because in the past, there was no clock, and people relied on the drum signals to tell them the time.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This research study on “Glong Pheln” aimed primarily to collect the information about “Glong Pheln” whose role has become less prominent in the Thai society. In the past, the drum signals were used in temples at 11.00 in the morning to tell the monks of the time for lunch. Nowadays, other items have replaced the drum such as bells, gongs and clocks. Consequently, one of the main functions of “Glong Pheln” is quickly disappearing.

From the study of “Glong Pheln” in the North-East of Thailand, with provincially central temples in 20 provinces in the region as the sample group, the results could be discussed and concluded as follows:

1. “Glong Pheln” is still used to send drum signals three times a day: “Glong Derk”, “Glong Pheln” and “Glong Laeng”. Nowadays, the role of “Glong Pheln” has been reduced and replaced by other items such as bells, clocks and audio systems. There are possible reasons for the replacement. Bells are used in place of drums because they are smaller, lighter, more convenient to move around, and more echoing. Clocks are convenient to carry and cheaper than drums. Audio systems give much louder noises.

2. In all the temples in this study, the drums are old and some are damaged, with torn leather on the surface of the drums. They have not yet been repaired possibly because the drum materials are hard to find, the large size of the drums makes the removal difficult, the repairs require a lot of budget, and there is a shortage of capable craftsmen.

3. The methods of drumming were not passed on from people in the previous generation. Out of the 20 temples in the study, only 3 temples have someone who can still remember how to drum “Glong Pheln”. The rest of the temples give only 1-rhythm signals. This is because it is monks who perform this duty, and this makes the knowledge distribution very limited.

4. The physical features of the drums in the study are as follows:

- Length: 100-250 cms.
- Diameter: 60-120 cms.
- Circumference: 200-350 cms.
- Drum sticks: Length = 30-50 cms.,
Circumference = 20-35 cms.

It could be observed that the drum size in general is large because their makers opted for loud and long, echoing sounds. Moreover, a large drum requires cooperation from community members to make because, due to its large size, the people need to come harmoniously together to help contribute manpower both for the making and for the transport of the drum.

7. Suggestions for Further Research

The following studies are suggested for further research:

1. A study of “Glong Pheln” in a wider area in terms of the number of temples in the study in order to gain information that can truly represent each area.
2. A study of “Glong Pheln” in other regions of Thailand in order to make a comparative study with existing research studies.

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