Features of Kammu music terminology
– A musico-linguistic study

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Background

Music terminology has seldom been studied by linguists except as a by-product of, for instance, the compilation of a dictionary. Some ethnomusicologists have cared for the matter, normally as an integrated part in studies of musical cultures. When linguists deal with musical terms they are usually not exact enough from a ethnomusicological point of view. On the other hand, ethnomusicologists normally lack the necessary linguistic training to be able to analyze and fully use their language material.

In a historical perspective, organologists, who study the details and history of musical instruments, used similarities in the names of instruments for comparative purposes, much in the same manner as ethnographers did. This use of music terminology still occurs. Alan P. Merriam approached music terminology as a general phenomenon in *The Anthropology of Music* (1964). He recognized 'verbal behavior' as one of a number of important factors in a music culture and he concluded that the verbal behaviour concerning music in the World's cultures ranged from very little discussion to elaborate and technical verbalizations. Ethnomusicologists like Bruno Nettl and Bela Foltin (1972) concerning Iran, Alain Daniélou (1966) concerning India and John Blacking (1967) concerning Venda children's songs, have built their studies completely on the insider's terminology. This has since then become normal in ethnomusicological studies. In *Sound and sentiment* (1982) Steven Feld drew upon his background in linguistics in an ethnomusicological study of songs of the Kaluli of New Guinea. He used indigenous terminology of music and birds in order to understand underlying symbolic concepts.

In this paper our respective backgrounds in ethnomusicology and linguistics are the starting point for a description of Kammu music terminology with the aims to isolate similarities and differences to other music cultures in Southeast Asia and to identify categories in the traditional Kammu concept of music.

Instrument names

Some names of musical instruments are related to those of neighbouring peoples, and are most probably borrowed: *kɔ̀ɔŋ* 'gong' (Lao, Thai), *mòoŋ* 'large bossed gong' (Lao, Thai), *créɛŋ* 'cymbals' (Lao, Thai), *róoŋ* 'jew's harp' (Thai *hooŋ*). Other instrument names seem to be indigenous. Many of them are obviously onomatopoeic, such as several names of wind instruments, which begin with *t-:*

túut	end-blown water-buffalo horn,
tpú	side-blown free-reed horn
tɔ́ɔt	flute
tlwə̀əl	flute

The corresponding instruments have quite different names among surrounding peoples.

The names of several idiophones of bamboo or wood begin with the minor syllable *k-, kl-* or *kr-*, which suggests that they are indigenous Mon-Khmer words:

kltɔ̀ɔŋ	bamboo concussion tubes [*Calung* (Java)]
trà kntíik	bamboo stamping tubes
k'lóok	slit-drum of bamboo
krlàk	long wooden slit-drum
krlèɛŋ	copper bell with a round opening and a clapper inside
klpàk	buffalo or cow bell made from a piece of bamboo or a calabash

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

prìiŋ wàaŋ	'long drum', long double-headed wooden drum
prìiŋ klúk	small single-headed wooden drum
prìiŋ prà	'monk drum', small hourglass drum
prìiŋ pə̀ət	idiochordic bamboo zither
prìiŋ pté	'earth drum', a ground harp

The words *klúk* and *pə̀ət* are onomatopoeic.

Terms of instrumental ensemble playing

In the Kammu language there is a rich terminology describing characteristics of various kinds of musical function and musical performances. Though a number of terms are abstract, there seems to be no overall term comparable to the term *music* and no word expressing that a piece of music is beautiful.

There is a rather exact terminology for percussive playing manners. This can be exemplified by terms referring to ensembles of bamboo concussion tubes called *kltɔ̀ɔŋ*. These may be struck simultaneously, *kmtʌʌn*, or in alternation, *trsúhsís*. In the latter case the individual instrumentalists in the ensemble are grouped according to the following schedule:

kmnɔ́ɔ	beginner (<kɔ́ɔ 'to begin')
pmɔ́ɔy	follower (<pɔ́ɔy 'to repeat')
kmtéc	stopper
rtlɔ́ɔt	never stopping (=bourdon) (<lɔ́ɔt 'to go on, not stop')

This terminology describes what is known as a colotomic pattern and has counterpoints in Javanese *angklung* tradition (Kunst 1973). In this respect Kammu musical terminology rather closely reflects Kammu musical traditions.

Voice character

Voice is called *tróoŋ* 'throat'. A nice voice is called *tróoŋ mìan* 'nice throat' or *tróoŋ trɔ́* 'suitable throat'. A bad voice is called *tróoŋ hmpɔ́ɔc* 'hairy throat', i.e. a voice that makes you feel like itching (the word *hmpɔ́ɔc* denotes the itching hairs that grow on certain plants).

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

síaŋ hncìm	soft sound, weak sound
síaŋ kràŋ	hard sound
síaŋ prèɛk	shrill sound
síaŋ kmpìŋ	low-pitched sound
síaŋ hntúr	'slack sound', i.e. muffled sound
síaŋ klyɔ́ɔŋ	'swimming sound', i.e. rolling sound

Song categories

A number of verbs meaning 'to sing' denote various degrees of recitation or singing, which are related to specific traditional musical situations, and to sex or age groups. Each of these types of singing employs one melody type, i.e. each type is monothematic in the sense that one melody type is used for a number of song-poems:

tɔ́əm	singing of the kind used at social parties
hrh̀i	singing of the kind used outside the party situation
yàam	'weeping', i.e. singing done by women
hrwɔ́	singing with the refrain *hrwɔ́*
húuwɔ́	singing with the refrain *húuwɔ́*

The word *tɔ́əm* is also used as the general verb for 'sing'. The noun *trnɔ́əm* is derived from this verb by the noun-forming infix -*rn*-. It means 'song-poem', but is also used in a general sense meaning 'any type of song', or 'singing', as in *trnɔ́əm kɔ́ɔn nè* 'children's song'.

Social singing in different dialect areas is described by the name of the area: *tɔ́əm Yùan, tɔ́əm Kwèɛn, tɔ́əm Cwàa, tɔ́əm Ùu, tɔ́əm Lúaŋ Pràbáaŋ*.

Other songs that belong to certain situations, ceremonies or rituals have their names after the situation, or the function within that situation:

lùy kɔ́ɔn sís	'lull child to sleep', lullaby
lɔ̀ɔŋ ŋɔ̀ɔr	'showing the way', sung at funeral wakes in order to guide the soul of the deceased to the land of the dead
yàam rɔ́oy	'cry for the spirit', dirge
kʔɔ́əy kmà	'calling the rain'
ɔ̀ɔc	'begging', a wassail song after the harvest
yùun ɦiŋ	'stamping tube dance', song at house-building feast
yùun rwàay	'tiger dance', song to drive out the tiger spirit

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

tɔ́əm síaŋ ktám	sing heavily
tɔ́əm síaŋ hmcàal	sing lightly
tɔ́əm káp kràan	sing in a relaxed way

Songs can be sung quickly without holding out individual tones or they can be sung so that certain tones are long. These are referred to as 'short' and 'stretched out' respectively:

tɔ́əm làt lòot	'sing shortly', i.e. sing quickly without pausing
tɔ́əm tɔ́ɔc ñɔ́ɔt	'sing stretched out ', i.e. sing slowly with many long tones

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

tɔ́əm síaŋ plók plók	'sing with a jumping sound', i.e. sing staccato
tɔ́əm krɦi krlàŋ	'sing in circles', i.e. continue to sing on final tones of phrases to an undulating melodic movement

Several terms denote various kinds of legato singing. Many of them refer to an undulating melodic movement. The phrase *tɔ́əm knhúul knhɔ́əc* has several meanings. The verb *knhúul* means 'to breathe as if breathless' and also describes the sound of the wedge-tailed pigeon, *htóoc*. If a person sings like this, people can say that he sings like this pigeon. This verb also describes the sound of the flute *tɔ́ɔt* and the bamboo idiophone *tàawtàaw* (the so called 'tuning fork' or *rere*, cf. Kaudern 1927). The verb *knhɔ́əc* means 'puff as if breathless'. In singing, the expression *tɔ́əm knhúul knhɔ́əc* refers to a longdrawn phrase sung to a deep breath, but there is also a short rhythmic-melodic pattern which is repeated in this legato manner with a rhythmic pulse reminiscent of short puffs. In certain cases the singer may employ the technique of singing while catching his breath. The words

knhúul and *knhɔ́ɔc* both have an onomatopoeic element and a prefix *kn-*: verbs of the form *kn-X* have the general meaning 'to make the sound X'.

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

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

Terms relating to poetry

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

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

To mix parts of different *trnɔ̀əm* without finishing any may be called *tɔ́əm prklák-prklík* 'sing helter-skelter' or *tɔ́əm prcàar prcìir* 'sing sparsely', jumping from one place to another (<*càar* 'sparse, thin').

To add many words without poetic structure into the performance is expressed with the word *còp* or *kpcòp* meaning 'to babble': *tɔ́əm còp càaŋ* 'sing babble-babble' or *tɔ́əm kpcòp* 'sing babbling'.

To be able to prolong the *trnɔ̀əm* with beautiful and polite words is considered a good quality of a singer. Adding words to a song-poem in performance is called *síaŋ tɔ́ɔc* 'prolonged sound'. When, for example, a phrase of the *trnɔ̀əm* is finished and prolonged with the words *déɛ nàaŋ* 'Oh, my dear', the singer may continue to sing beautiful or polite words for some time.

Conclusions

A general characteristic of Kammu music terminology is that it is particularly rich where musical functions and situations are concerned. This is shared with many other societies which are not socially very stratified and in which people in general join in many musical situations (cf. for example Feld 1982). In Kammu society, there is no term or specialisation corresponding to *musician*.

A number of names for musical instruments point at relations to surrounding peoples. But it is also possible to interpret the terminology as representing certain categories:

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

the t-group contains onomatopoeic names for wind instruments.

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

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

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