



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Creation of Tte Musical Suite: Deung Bob Thow

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ABSTRACT

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The creation of the musical suite "Deung Bob Thow" is an artistic exploration that embodies the distinct identity of Mon music, which has played a significant role in cultural preservation through generations. This creation investigates the historical background of the Mon ethnicity, analyzes the unique characteristics of Mon musical expressions, and develops a musical composition that integrates traditional Mon and Thai elements. Using the Mon Piphat ensemble as the primary instrumentation, the composition employs melodic and rhythmic structures characteristic of Mon music while incorporating contemporary adaptations in vocal and instrumental techniques. The methodology consists of document analysis, field studies, and creative experimentation. The finding results demonstrate the potential of musical creativity in sustaining and revitalizing Mon cultural heritage through innovative compositional approaches. The implications of this work extend to the broader field of ethnomusicology and cultural preservation, providing a foundation for future interdisciplinary studies in music and the performing arts.

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INTRODUCTION

The musical and performing arts culture of the Mon people represents a valuable cultural heritage with profound historical significance in Thailand. The Mon, an ethnic group with a long-standing tradition of artistic and cultural refinement, have historically experienced displacement due to Burmese invasions, leading to multiple waves of migration into Thailand from the Ayutthaya period through the Rattanakosin era. These migrations facilitated the transmission of Mon musical and artistic traditions, most notably the Mon *Piphat* ensemble, which plays an integral role in both auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies.

The Mon *Piphat* ensemble has undergone continuous evolution since the Ayutthaya period, incorporating adaptations to align with Thai cultural influences. One such modification is the integration of the Thai *Ranat Ek* (soprano xylophone) and *Ranat Thum* (tenor xylophone) into the ensemble. The Mon *Piphat* ensemble is traditionally categorized into three sizes: *Piphat Mon Khrueang Ha* (the five-piece Mon *Piphat*), *Piphat Mon Khrueang Khu* (the double Mon *Piphat*), and *Piphat Mon Khrueang Yai* (the grand Mon *Piphat*), each characterized by distinctive instrumentation and functions. The grand Mon *Piphat*, for instance, typically comprises large Mon gongs, *ranat ek*, *ranat thum*, Mon oboe (*Pi Mon*), Mon Barreled drums (*Taphon Mon*), and Mon Melodic drums (*Poeng Mang Khok*). (Weera Phansuea, 2015)

Mon musical compositions performed within the *Piphat* ensemble exhibit unique melodic and rhythmic structures. Notable examples include *Choen Tang Mai* (originally titled *Choen Hang Mai*), and *Pae Mang Phlu*, both of which feature distinctive melodies and are performed in various ceremonial contexts. The study of Mon history and culture is essential for the preservation and continuation of this musical heritage, ensuring its legacy for future generations.

Origin and meaning of the title "Deung Bob Thow" derive from the Mon language, where "Deung" means "city" or "land," "Bob" refers to a "sacred bird" akin to a swan, and "Thow" signifies "gold." Together, the name symbolizes the grandeur and spiritual essence of the Mon cultural heritage, representing the golden city of the Mon people and their revered artistic traditions. The name encapsulates the historical and cultural narratives embedded within Mon music, emphasizing its

significance as a vessel of identity and storytelling. The suite draws inspiration from these meanings, translating them into musical expressions that reflect the resilience, devotion, and artistic excellence of the Mon community.

This article presents the creative development of the musical suite *Deung Bop Thow*, a work designed to narrate the history and cultural identity of the Mon people through music. By integrating elements of both Thai and Mon musical traditions, this composition seeks to enhance audience appreciation and understanding of the enduring beauty of Mon culture, which continues to thrive within Thai society today.

Objectives

1. To explore the historical background of the Mon ethnicity and its musical traditions.
2. To analyze and document the distinctive features of Mon musical expressions.
3. To create a musical suite that reflects Mon cultural identity while incorporating modern adaptations.

Creative Cognition Clarifying

1. Inspiration

The creation of musical and artistic works often draws inspiration from the history, culture, and heritage of various ethnic groups, particularly in the case of the Mon *Piphat* ensemble, which possesses deep cultural roots and an extensive historical background. The inspiration for musical creation *Deung Bob Thow* stems from both Mon ethnic history and the historical development of the Mon *Piphat* ensemble itself.

Mon Ethnicity Background

The Mon ethnic group has a rich historical legacy and distinctive cultural traditions, particularly in music and performing arts. As one of the ethnic groups inhabiting Southeast Asia, the Mon have significantly influenced the cultural landscape of other groups in the region. Mon culture has permeated Thai society since the Ayutthaya period and has eventually become an integral part of Thai cultural heritage.

The Mon possess a distinguished musical culture, particularly evident in the Mon *Piphat* ensemble, which serves both auspicious and inauspicious ceremonial functions. Mon musical culture not only reflects the beliefs and traditions of their community but also demonstrates the relationship between humans, sacred entities, and nature. For instance, the use of invocation music (*Phleng Choen*) in various ceremonies serves to announce and invite sacred entities to participate in ritual ceremonies (Weera Phansuea, 2015: 25).

Historical Development of the Mon *Piphat* Ensemble

The Mon *Piphat* ensemble has an intriguing history and has played a significant role in Thai culture since the Ayutthaya period. Originally used in Mon ceremonial rituals, the ensemble evolved and adapted to Thai cultural contexts following Mon migration into Thailand.

During the Ayutthaya period, the Mon *Piphat* ensemble was incorporated into various royal ceremonies, including royal funerals and entertainment events. The ensemble also became associated with Thai funeral ceremonies, particularly among the aristocratic class, establishing itself as a symbol of prestigious court funerals (Weera Phansuea, 2015: 25).

The Mon *Piphat* ensemble comprises essential instruments such as the Mon gong (Khong Mon), Mon double-headed drum (Taphon Mon), Mon oboe (Pi Mon), and circular wooden xylophone (Poeng Mang Kok). Each instrument plays a vital role in the ensemble. The Mon gong, in particular, is considered a sacred instrument and symbolizes the revered teachers whom Mon musicians hold in high esteem (Weera Phansuea, 2015: 25).



Figure 1: The Mon *Piphat* ensemble

Source: Image by Author.

2. Concepts and Related Theories

The creation of musical and artistic works is not merely an expression of the creator's emotions and feelings, but also reflects the cultural background, history, and social context surrounding the creator. The creator has studied concepts and theories related to musical creation, which can serve as a conceptual framework for analyzing and explaining the inspiration and ideas behind the work.

Thai Music Composition Theory

Thai music composition is not simply a systematic arrangement of sounds for entertainment purposes but represents a process that reflects the artistic and cultural wisdom of Thai society. As Buntham Tramot stated, Thai music composition comprises several elements such as melody, accent, rhythm, rhythmic patterns, counterpoint, and other components, all of which are essential in giving the music its unique characteristics (Buntham Tramot, 2000, cited in Waraporn Cherdchu, 2009, p.65).

Thai music composition requires consideration not only of melody and rhythm but also of harmonization and appropriate use of various musical instruments according to the nature of the song. For example, the use of the large gong (Kong Wong Yai) as the primary instrument for playing the main melody stems from its historical significance and central role in Thai musical ensembles (Orawan Banjongsilp et al., 1991, cited in Waraporn Cherdchu, 2009, p.67).

Creative Thinking Theory

Creativity is a crucial process in creating artistic and musical works. Naraphong Charassri defines creativity as the initiation of new ideas or creation of novel elements that differ from conventional thinking, potentially arising from the integration of multiple disciplines to produce innovative and valuable work (Naraphong Charassri, cited in Chanida Chan-ngam, 2018).

In the context of musical creation, creativity may emerge from the fusion of Thai musical culture with other ethnic musical traditions, such as incorporating Mon or Chinese musical elements into Thai compositions. This results in diversity and innovation in musical works. For example, the creation of "Cherd Jeen" demonstrates the fusion of Thai melodies with Chinese musical accents, giving the piece a unique identity while reflecting cultural diversity (Waraporn Cherdchu, 2009, Abstract).

Theory of Ethnic Diffusion

Cultural and ethnic diffusion plays a vital role in musical creation. Franz Boas stated that the culture of each ethnic group can spread to other groups through migration or cultural exchange (Boas, cited in Amara Pongsapich, 1998, p.104).

In the case of the Mon *Piphat* ensemble, which has been prevalent in Thailand since the Ayutthaya period, cultural exchange between Thai and Mon cultures has led to musical fusion. This includes the incorporation of Mon musical instruments into Thai ensembles and the adjustment of instrument tuning to accommodate both Mon and Thai musical styles (Weera Phansuea, 2015, p.25).

Inspiration from Cultural Creation Works

Inspiration for musical creation often derives from ethnic groups' culture and history. For example, the creation of "Bua Sam Lao" was inspired by the Buddhist doctrine of the three lotuses from the Sutta Pitaka, reflecting religious beliefs and auspiciousness (Thiti Thasanakulwong, 2018, Abstract).

Additionally, the creation of performing arts often draws inspiration from local culture, such as the creation of the "Thong Thai Yuan" performance, which reflects the culture and local wisdom of Thai Yuan people in Saraburi Province (Thitima Ongthong, 2022, p. 56)

The concepts and inspiration in creating musical and artistic works are rooted in Thai music composition theory, creative thinking theory, and ethnic diffusion theory. The fusion of Thai musical culture with other ethnic musical traditions results in works with unique characteristics that reflect cultural diversity. Furthermore, inspiration from culture and history plays a crucial role in creating works that reflect the identity and local wisdom of various ethnic groups.

CREATIVE RESULT

1. Structural Design of the Musical Suite

The musical suite *Deung Bop Thow* is systematically structured, with its narrative divided into four main sections, each corresponding to key historical events of the Mon people: their period of prosperity, the loss of their homeland, their migration, and their settlement in Siam. This structured design not only enables the audience to follow the storyline seamlessly but also bridges the past and present through musical language. The composition follows the framework outlined below:

Section 1: Introduction

The suite opens with *Rua Mon Sam La*, a piece featuring an invigorating melody and a traditional Mon rhythmic pattern (*nha thap*), serving as an overture that conveys the Mon people's heritage and past grandeur. Central to this movement are the poeng mang (Mon barrel drums) and taphon Mon (Mon melodic drums), which create a solemn and majestic atmosphere, evoking pride in Mon cultural identity. The lyrics, composed in a structured poetic form, further enhance the storytelling by providing a refined narrative.

Section 2: The Loss of Homeland and Migration

This section transitions into a more urgent and sorrowful tone, represented through *Yok Talum* and *Thayae Mon*. The rhythmic complexity of *nha thap yok talum*, reminiscent of battle sequences, and the melancholic melodic lines played by string instruments evoke the suffering and struggles endured by the Mon people during their displacement. This musical depiction enables the audience to emotionally grasp the sense of loss and the arduous journey of migration.

Section 3: Seeking Royal Protection

The third movement, *Yam Kham*, reflects a period of stability and cultural integration through a serene and contemplative musical setting. The tempo is moderated by *nha thap yam kham*, performed in both two-layered and single-layered rhythmic structures. The harmonic interplay between Thai and Mon instruments symbolizes the peaceful coexistence and cultural synthesis between the Mon and the Thai people.

Section 4: A Life of Peace and Prosperity

The final section, *Krao Ram Mon*, adopts an uplifting and lively character, embodying the Mon people's everyday life, agricultural traditions, and shared cultural practices. The distinctive rhythmic pattern of *nha thap krao ram* enhances the suite's conclusion with a sense of renewal and communal fulfillment.

The entire structure of the suite is meticulously crafted to "narrate" history through a progressive musical arc, from the beginning of the Mon people's journey to its resolution. Balancing historical narrative with expressive musical elements, *Doeng Bop Tho* serves not only as an artistic work but also as an immersive medium for experiencing living history through music.

2. The Composition of the Musical Suite *Deung Bob Thow*

The Musical Suite *Deung Bob Thow* is a creative work that seamlessly integrates Mon history, culture, and music. Its composition follows a distinct structure, emphasizing historical chronology and cultural symbolism.

1) Principles of Song Arrangement

The six songs in this suite are arranged in historical order, portraying the trajectory of the Mon people—from their prosperous past to their cultural assimilation in Thailand. Each song carries a specific theme and purpose:

Rua Mon ("Rua" refers to a rapid drumming pattern) – Narrates the origins of the Mon people, highlighting their established settlements and flourishing culture.

Yok Talum ("Talum" is a tall ceremonial vessel used in rituals) – Represents the struggle to preserve Mon artistic and cultural identity, symbolizing resistance against Burmese invasions and territorial loss.

Thayae Mon ("Thayae" derives from a Mon term meaning "singing") – Depicts Mon antiphonal singing traditions accompanied by instrumental music and dance, expressing sorrow and longing for their homeland during exile.

Yam Kham ("Yam Kham" refers to dusk, signifying the start of a new life in Siam) – Expresses gratitude to the Thai monarchy for providing refuge and protection.

Choen Phi (Two Variations: The Second and the First) – Draws inspiration from Mon ancestral worship rituals, reflecting spiritual beliefs and the continuity of Mon traditions.

Krao Ram Mon ("Krao Ram" means Mon-style dancing) – Showcases Mon-Thai cultural exchanges and the peaceful coexistence of both communities.

Furthermore, the author carefully considered the musical identity of the Mon people by incorporating traditional drum rhythmic patterns (*nha thap*) appropriate for Mon music. This integration serves as a crucial compositional element, enhancing the emotional expression of the songs while seamlessly connecting the historical narratives of the Mon people.

2) Lyric Composition

The lyrics of the musical suite *Doeng Bop Tho* are composed in the *klon suphap* (กลอนสุภาพ), a traditional Thai poetic form known for its melodious structure and effective communication. This form consists of four-line stanzas, with each line containing 8–9 syllables and a system of internal rhyme that enhances fluidity and memorability. The researcher selected *klon suphap* for its ability to convey complex narratives in an organized manner while preserving the essence of Thai literary tradition.

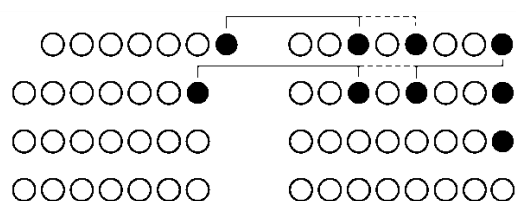


Figure 2: Klon Suphap poetic form

The lyrical content is structured around three primary themes:

- 1) The History of the Mon People
- 2) Migration and the Loss of Homeland
- 3) Culture and Way of Life

Example 1: Song "Rua Mon" (Honoring Mon Prosperity)

ชนชาติมอญ ก่อนเก่า เหนือเวศ
 หัวเขต มีสุข สนุกสนาน
 แสนสงบ สพลุช ทุกทิวาร
 แพร่ขาน อารยะ ประเพณี

Translation and Explanation:

*The Mon people once flourished in their homeland,
 Where joy and peace spread across the land.
 Serene and prosperous from dawn to dusk,
 Their culture and traditions shone bright and grand.*

This stanza employs internal rhymes such as เก่า-เนา (kao-nao) and สุข-สนุก (suk-sanuk), enhancing its rhythmic flow and making the lyrics more memorable.

Example 2: Song "Thayae Mon" (Lamenting the Loss of Homeland)

พม่าไล่ หมายรอน มอญหลบ
 สิ้นพิภพ รามัญประเทศ เขตกรุงศรี
 ระหกระเหิร อพยพ พบธานี
 ถึงไทย หมายเป็นที่ คำชีวา

Translation and Explanation:

*Driven away, the Mon fled in despair,
 Their homeland lost, Raman unaware.
 Wandering homeless, seeking new ground,
 In Siam, they sought refuge profound.*

Powerful words such as ไล่ (lai, meaning "pursue") and หลบ (lop, meaning "flee") effectively convey the struggle and desperation of the Mon people's forced migration. The term ระหกระเหิร (ra-ha-kra-heun, meaning "wandering in hardship") further emphasizes the gravity of their suffering.

Example 3: Song "Yam Kham" (Settlement in Siam)

เข้าพึ่ง บรมโพธิ-สมภาร
 สร้างถิ่นฐาน บ้านเมือง เรืองสง่า
 หัวคาม สยามเทศน์ เขตอาณา
 ด้วยมหา บารมีรัฐ กษัตริย์ไทย

Translation and Explanation:

*Under royal grace, they found protection,
 Building a home with grand affection.
 Within Siam's lands, they thrived anew,
 Through the King's great virtue, their culture grew.*

This stanza reflects gratitude and harmony, with words like

บรมโพธิสมภาร (borom bodhi somphan, meaning "royal grace") and เรืองสง่า (ruang sa-nga, meaning "magnificent prosperity") signifying the benevolence of the Thai monarchy in providing sanctuary.

Example 4: Song "Yam Kham" (Settlement in Siam)

เผยแผ่ แห่หงส์ ธงตะขาบ

ไทยทราบ ประเพณี พิธีไสย

สงกรานต์มอญ สอนข้าวแช่ แพร่ไกล

ชนของไทย เชื้อของมอญ สุนทรนนท์

Translation and Explanation:

The swan soars high, centipede's banners march in a stride,

Thai hearts unite, embracing rites with pride.

Mon Songkran's flow, rice soaked, blessings shared,

In traditions exchanged, our heritage declared.

This stanza adheres strictly to the *klon suphap* poetic form, ensuring elegance and memorability through internal rhymes such as แผ่-แห่ (phae-hae) and ประเพณี-พิธี (prapheni-phithi).

Key cultural references include:

Hae Hong – A Mon ceremonial procession featuring a golden swan, often performed in funerals or religious events to symbolize spiritual ascension.

Thong Takab – A centipede-shaped banner used in Mon rituals, symbolizing prosperity and protection.

Songkran Mon – The Mon celebration of the traditional New Year, distinct for its water-pouring rituals, sand pagoda building, and unique merit-making ceremonies.

Khao Chae – A traditional Mon dish, later embraced as a Thai delicacy, signifying the deep-rooted cultural integration.

By employing the *klon suphap* poetic form, the lyrics not only enhance the musicality of the suite but also present complex historical and cultural narratives in an accessible and engaging way. This approach ensures that the suite remains both an artistic expression and an educational medium, preserving both Thai and Mon heritage through song.

The Musical Suite *Deung Bob Thow* serves as both a historical narrative and a cultural bridge, preserving the Mon heritage through structured poetic expression and musical storytelling. Each song not only encapsulates historical moments but also embodies Mon spiritual beliefs, traditional arts, and their adaptation within Thai society. Through this meticulous composition, the suite ensures that Mon identity and cultural contributions remain vibrant and accessible to future generations.

Video example of each lyrical section are available for listening at QR Code.



**Figure 3. QR Code for "Deung Bob Thow" Musical Suite.
Scan to listen to audio excerpts of the composition.**

DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

Deung Bob Thow illustrates how creative cognition serves as a vehicle for cultural stewardship. By cognitively engaging with Mon heritage through Thai artistic lenses, the project transcends mere

preservation, fostering a living tradition that resonates with modern audiences. Future research could explore neural correlates of cross-cultural music perception, deepening understanding of how cognitive processes mediate cultural sustainability.

The findings of this creation work underscore the importance of cultural preservation through creative practices. The integration of traditional Mon music into contemporary compositions offers a viable pathway for sustaining heritage music. Future research could expand this approach by incorporating additional Mon musical styles and interdisciplinary collaborations in performing arts.

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BIO

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