

Guidelines for Preserving Mon Music in Mottama Town,  
Mon State, Myanmar

แนวทางการอนุรักษ์ดนตรีมอญ เมืองเมาะตะมะ รัฐมอญ  
ในประเทศสาธารณรัฐแห่งสหภาพเมียนมาร์

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**Abstract**

This research aimed to: 1) study the history, traits, and elements of the Mon music performed in Mottama Town in the Mon State of Myanmar and 2) propose guidelines to preserve this type of music. The study employed a qualitative design. The researchers collected the data by using in-depth interviews and observational techniques. The collected data was analyzed and presented in descriptive form.

**The study revealed:**

1. The musical band which performs Mon music in Mottama town was established by the Mon Cultural Center in 1990 to 1992. Mon music is divided into five groups : 1) percussion instruments made from metal and wood, 2) percussion instruments made from animal skin, 3) woodwind instruments, 4) string instruments, and 5) other percussion instruments. There are five kinds of Mon songs: 1) royal songs, 2) religious songs, 3) love songs, 4) songs about beliefs, and 5) general songs. Mon songs and music are

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performed during both auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies such as entertainment events, receiving honored guests, celebrations, and also for occasions of misery. The elements of Mon music consist of the following : 1) the tuning system depends on the musical techniques, 2) the rhythm of the music controls the duration of the songs, 3) the pitch is always varying from high to low; the players must know the musical scales of each song, and 4) the form of the song is divided into parts, phrases, and sentences.

2. Guidelines to preserve the Mon music of Mottama town in the Mon State of Myanmar are that the government should provide a sufficient budget and places for the performance of Mon music. A bigger budget is needed to collect and maintain the Mon musical instruments and songs. Musicians and audiences for this type of music should be encouraged.

**Keywords :** guidelines for preserving Mon Music,

### **บทคัดย่อ**

การศึกษาวิจัยเรื่องแนวทางการอนุรักษ์ดนตรีมอญ เมืองเมาะตะมะ รัฐมอญ ในประเทศสาธารณรัฐแห่งสหภาพเมียนมาร์ มีวัตถุประสงค์ 1) เพื่อศึกษาประวัติความเป็นมา ลักษณะและองค์ประกอบของดนตรีมอญ เมืองเมาะตะมะ รัฐมอญ ในประเทศสาธารณรัฐสหภาพเมียนมาร์ 2) ศึกษาแนวทางการอนุรักษ์ดนตรีมอญ เมืองเมาะตะมะ รัฐมอญ ในประเทศสาธารณรัฐสหภาพเมียนมาร์ มีการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากเอกสาร และข้อมูลภาคสนาม ที่ได้จากการสัมภาษณ์ และการสังเกต นำมาศึกษาวิเคราะห์ สังเคราะห์และนำเสนอผลการวิจัยในรูปแบบพรรณนาวิเคราะห์

### **ผลการวิจัยพบว่า**

1. ประวัติความเป็นมา ลักษณะและองค์ประกอบของดนตรีมอญเมืองเมาะตะมะ รัฐมอญ ในประเทศสาธารณรัฐแห่งสหภาพเมียนมาร์ เป็นวงดนตรีที่สืบทอดมาจากรุ่นสู่รุ่น

วัฒนธรรมมอญ ได้จัดก่อตั้งขึ้น ระหว่างปี ค.ศ.1990-1992 ลักษณะของดนตรีมอญแบ่งได้ 5 กลุ่ม ได้แก่ กลุ่มที่ 1 เครื่องดนตรีประเภทตีดำเนินทำนองที่ทำด้วยโลหะและไม้ กลุ่มที่ 2 เครื่องหนัง กลุ่มที่ 3 เครื่องลม กลุ่มที่ 4 เครื่องสาย กลุ่มที่ 5 เครื่องเคาะ เพลงมอญแบ่งออกเป็น 5 กลุ่ม กลุ่มที่ 1 ได้แก่ เพลงที่เกี่ยวกับเจ้า กลุ่มที่ 2 เพลงที่เกี่ยวกับศาสนา กลุ่มที่ 3 เพลงที่เกี่ยวกับความรัก กลุ่มที่ 4 เพลงที่เกี่ยวกับความเชื่อ และกลุ่มที่ 5 เพลงทั่วไปๆ ไม่เจาะจง โอกาสที่นำไปใช้สามารถนำไปบรรเลงเพื่อความสนุกสนาน ต้อนรับแขกบ้านแขกเมือง งานเฉลิมฉลองในทุกโอกาส งานมงคลและงานอวมงคล องค์ประกอบดนตรีมอญประกอบด้วย 1) ทำนองของที่เพลงบรรเลง จะมีเสียงสูงต่ำสั้นยาวสลับกันตามเทคนิคของการบรรเลง 2) จังหวะจะเป็นตัวกำหนดความเร็วของบทเพลง 3) เสียงของดนตรีจะมีการเปลี่ยนระดับเสียงของบทเพลง อยู่ตลอด แต่เมื่อบรรเลงเพลงใดผู้บรรเลงจะต้องรู้ว่าเพลงนั้นบันไดเพลงใด 4) รูปแบบโครงสร้างของบทเพลงจะมีการแบ่งเป็นท่อน เป็นวรรค และประโยคของบทเพลง ตามลักษณะของเพลงที่บรรเลง

2. แนวทางการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรมมอญ เมืองมาเอะตะมะ รัฐมอญ ในประเทศ สาธารณรัฐแห่งสหภาพเมียนมาร์ ควรมีการสนับสนุน ด้านการเงิน สถานที่ ตลอดจนการจัดงาน และกิจกรรมต่างๆ ให้มีดนตรีมอญเข้าไปเกี่ยวข้องด้วยทุกครั้ง เพื่อเป็นการส่งเสริม การทำนุบำรุง อนุรักษ์มรดกทางด้านดนตรี รวมถึงการเก็บรวบรวมดูแลรักษาซ่อมแซม ทั้งเครื่องดนตรี บทเพลง นักดนตรี และผู้ฟัง

**คำสำคัญ** แนวทางการอนุรักษ์วัฒนธรรมมอญ เมืองมาเอะตะมะ รัฐมอญ ประเทศ สาธารณรัฐสหภาพเมียนมาร์

## Introduction

The Mon people have their own culture and some of the Mon cultural practices have been well preserved, such as religions and traditions. Mon music is an example of the traditional culture which has been practiced in Mon society. Mon music has been part of ceremonial activities such as the Song Kran Festival and in other ritual ceremonies including funerals. At the present,

there were two types of Mon music: traditional music and a new form of music which is a mixture of traditional and modern music. The new type of music is popular among the Mon, Burmese, and Thai people and is performed at many social activities. (Saisunee Khowpum, 2000 : 63)

Mon musical instruments consist of Kong Mon, Ranad Mon, Tapone Mon, Pee Mon, and Perng Mang drums. Mon music is loved by many musicians and others due to its beautiful melody. However, only people who are dedicated and have a good memory can learn this type of music because the Mon teachers do not have accurate teaching methods and teaching aids to impart knowledge about the music to the learners. The learners need to observe, remember, and practice by themselves. Mon music can be considered to be one of the most precious cultural heritages of the Mon people which has been handed down from generation to generation. Mon music is still meaningful to the Mon and the Mon people accept their music to be part of their identity. However, in our global civilization and the modern technology era, Mon music is threatened and weakened by new technology. Therefore, the Mon people should realize the significance of their own music and try to preserve this precious heritage for the next generations. (Saisunee Khowpum, 2000 : 63)

### **Research Objectives**

1. To study the history, traits, and elements of Mon music performed in Mottama Town in the Mon State of Myanmar.
2. To propose guidelines to preserve this type of music.

## Research Methodology

This research was guided by four concerns: area, content, informants, and period of study.

1. Area of study : the researchers chose the area of study to be Mottama town, Mon State, Myanmar.

2. Content of study : there were two areas that the researcher wanted to investigate in this study:

2.1 The history of Mon music and the way of life and culture of the musicians who perform Mon music at Mottama, Mon State, Myanmar.

2.2 Knowledge about Mon music; traits and elements of Mon music: form, melody, rhythm, and techniques.

3. Informants of the study

3.1 Key informants were chosen by a purposive sampling technique. They were local academics and experts who were knowledgeable in Mon music.

3.2 Casual Informants were local musicians who were performing Mon music in the area and people who had experiences or had been accepted by the Mon music community including the music teachers, leaders of the band, and professional musicians.

3.3 General informants consisted of the audience of Mon music and local people in the community.

4. Period of study

From January 2012 to January 2014

## Research Instruments

1. An interview guide consisting of both structured and non-structured interview forms. There were two types of interviews : 1) an in-depth

interview was used to ask key informants and casual informants about the history, traits, and elements of Mon music, as well as the lifestyles of these people and 2) a general interview was used to question the audience, people who hired the band, and owners of entertainment places.

2. Observation : The researchers employed both participatory observation and non-participatory observation to observe the performances of the Mon band and the musicians' behavior. The equipment used to collect data included a notebook, tape recorder, and cameras.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data from documents, research papers, and interviews, observations, as well as from focus group discussions were analyzed based on the objectives of the study. The findings were then checked using qualitative methods and presented in descriptive form as follows :

1. History, traits, and elements of Mon music performed in Mottama Town in the Mon State of Myanmar
2. Guidelines to preserve this type of music

### **Results of the Study**

1. History, traits, and elements of Mon music performed in Mottama Town in the Mon State of Myanmar :

1.1 The Mon music band at Mottama town, Mon State in Myanmar was established by the Mon Cultural Center in 1990 to 1992 as part of the cultural heritage. The objectives of the Mon Cultural Center in Mottama town are to collect and preserve the Mon culture and every aspect of the Mons who lived in the Mon State in Myanmar and in Thailand. The Mon Cultural Center in

Mottama has organized a lot of activities such as workshops and meetings among the people who were interested in preserving the Mon culture including music, dances, and language. (Robert, 2000 : Abstract)

1.2 There are 5 groups of Mon musical instruments (Jarernchai, 2014 : 1-20)

1.2.1 Percussion instruments made from metal and wood are as follows:



Klong Mon (Pat Kang)



Ranadlek (Pat Kia)



Ranadek (Pat Kala Toon)

1.2.2 Percussion instruments made from animal skin (Klong

Hapern)



Hapern Hahonak (one big drum)



Hapern (one medium-sized drum)



Krone Hapern (four drums)



Perngmangkok (Pa Tawai)

1.2.3 Woodwind instruments



Pee Mon (Kanui)



Klui Mon (Talode)

1.2.4 String instruments



Jakhe Mon (Jayam)



Pin Mon (Tana)



Saw Sam Sai Mon (Kraw)



Violin Mon (Kraw)

Collection Asst.Prof.Dr. JarechaiChonpairot

### 1.2.5 Percussion instruments



Ching -Kraw (Hadee Hadab)



Chab Yai (Chan)



Kong Mong Mon (Mong)

2.3 From interviews with the academics, experts, and professional musicians, it was revealed that there were approximately over 100 songs performed in the past, but currently only a few are being performed in Mottama town. There are five groups of Mon songs being performed at different occasions as follows (Nai Htaw, 2006 : Abstract)

2.3.1 songs performed for royal ceremonies such as songs dedicated to the King

2.3.2 songs to worship God

2.3.3 Love songs such as Thayae Mon

2.3.4 Songs about beliefs and ritual songs such as Ghost Worshipping songs

2.3.5 General songs such as folk songs

2.4 The occasions to have the Mon music band perform at Mottama town in the Mon State in Myanmar vary depending on the purposes. Most of the Mon music was chosen to be performed for entertainment purposes such as greeting honored guests and celebrations. The music was played to accompany the performances of Mon history, legends, beliefs,

nature, and religions. Last year, on the occasion of the celebration of the Mon Nation, the Mon music band was invited to perform in several states in Myanmar and in other nearby countries where there are Mon communities such as Thailand, India, Laos, and China. (Yang, 2002 : Abstract)

2.5 The elements of Mon music are as follows (Sarrazin, 2003 : Abstract)

2.5.1 The pitch system of Mon music has varieties of speed and melodies depending on the purposes of the songs' composers. The songs with slow melodies are used to convey feelings of tenderness, sweetness, or sadness, whereas the songs with faster paces evoke feelings of excitement and happiness. The music scales of Mon music are similar to those of Thai music. Mon music is composed of 7 notes and 5 notes. They use numbers (such as 1, 2 etc.) instead of regular music notes.

2.5.2 There are two types of rhythm in Mon music as follows:

1) The Hadee Ha dab (percussion instrument) is used to control the rhythm of the music to be slow or fast—like the Ching of Thai music.

2) The Haperndrum and Patawai drum are used to control the rhythm of the music.

3) The pitch of Mon music is varying all the time from high to low. The musicians have to be aware of the music scales when they perform each song. The Mon musical instruments have a small range of pitch.

4) Mon music is divided into parts. Each part is then divided into small phrases and sentences. Mon songs can consist of only one part or many parts. However, each part will have its meaning. The length of

300 วารสารวิชาการมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏภูเก็ต

each song depends on the composer. The composer will compose the music based on the rhythm of the drums.



Mottama music band



Mottama Musicians

## 2. Guidelines to preserve Mon music at Mottama town in the Mon State, Myanmar

### 2.1 Guidelines to preserve Mon music

From the interviews with the musicians and other people involved with the Mon music in Mottama town, the guidelines are as follows :

2.1.1 The Mottama town administrators should provide a budget and places to perform as well as organize activities to promote and preserve Mon music. They also need assistance in collecting and maintaining the instruments, and music.

2.1.2 The Mottama town administrators should encourage local people to share their experiences in music and learn from each other. Mon music should be made a part of the school curriculum so that students can learn about it in the school system. Rehearsal, the teaching of the music, and performances of Mon music should be enhanced in the Mon community as a heritage for the next generation.

2.1.3 A center should be established to develop Mon music on a national and international level. The center should provide knowledge about Mon music to the ASEAN community and other countries through a website.

### 2.2 Guidelines to preserve Mon musical instruments

2.2.1 The Mottama town administrators should establish a center to collect and showcase Mon traditional musical instruments as well as modern instruments to the visitors. In the center, stories of Mon music and each instrument should be written for those who are interested in studying the subject. The center should also have brochures and booklets about Mon music for students and visitors.

2.2.2 A group of people who make Mon musical instruments should collaborate to operate a Mon musical instruments business in Mottama town. There should also be a center which provides services in maintaining and fixing the instruments and offer training courses regarding producing and fixing Mon musical instruments. This will make people aware of the value of Mon musical instruments and want to preserve them.

2.2.3 The quality of the musical instruments should be improved by using top quality materials. The musical instrument producers should continue making the instruments for the local markets and as souvenirs for tourists to take home. The instruments that can be made as souvenirs are Saw Mon (Krai), Jakhae Mon (Jayam), and Kong Wong (Pad Kang).

### 2.3 Guidelines for preserving Mon music

From the interviews with the musicians and other people involved with the Mon music in Mottama town, the guidelines are as follows:

2.3.1 The notes of Mon music should be written down.

2.3.2 Mon music should be made into CDs and VCDs.

2.3.3 Mon music should be taught in school curriculums.

### 2.4 Guidelines to preserve the Mon musicians

From the interviews with the musicians and other people involved with the Mon music in Mottama town, the guidelines are as follows:

2.4.1 The musicians should work as a group. The Mon Center should be a place where these musicians can get together to learn from and share with each other. A database of Mon musicians should be started.

2.4.2 Activities concerning Mon music should be organized in order to strengthen the relationship of the musicians. The Musicians could work together to arrange activities for children who are interested in Mon music such as a contest for young musicians of Mon music. This can help to

promote and preserve Mon music as well as encourage the younger generations to love their music heritage.

## 2.5 Guidelines to preserve the Mon music audience

From the interviews with the musicians and other people involved with Mon music in Mottama town, the guidelines are as follows:

2.5.1 Mon music should be placed in the school curriculum from the very beginning. Students should be trained to play and sing Mon music from the primary level. This would create both musicians and audiences for Mon music.

2.5.2 Mon music should be promoted by various organizations including government, musicians, private organizations, and educational institutions. Modern technology should be used to produce both pictures and sounds of Mon music to be shown to the public through various types of media including newspapers, radios, and televisions. The public will become aware of the beautiful nature of Mon music and understand its instruments.

## Summary

The results of the study are discussed based on the objectives of the research as follows:

1. The Mon music band at Mottama town, Mon State in Myanmar was established by the Mon Cultural Center in 1990 to 1992 as a part of cultural heritage.

Mon music is divided into five groups : 1) percussion instruments made from metal and wood, 2) percussion instruments made from animal skin, 3) woodwind instruments, 4) string instruments, and 5) other percussion instruments. There are five kinds of Mon songs : 1) royal songs, 2) religious

songs, 3) love songs, 4) songs about beliefs, and 5) general songs. Mon songs and music are performed during both auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies such as for entertainment, receiving honored guests, celebrations, and also for occasions of misery. The elements of Mon music consist of the following : 1) the pitch system depends on the musical techniques, 2) the rhythm of the music controls the duration of the songs, 3) the pitch is always varying; the player must know the musical scales of each song, and 4) the form of the song is divided into parts, phrases, sentences. (Nicolas, 2007 : Abstract)

2. Guidelines to preserve Mon music at Mottama town are that the Government should provide a budget and establish a center for Mon music. This place will be used for arranging activities to promote, nurture, and preserve Mon music and for collecting and maintaining the musical instruments. The center can be used to help musicians and attract an audience for Mon music.

There is need for Mon music to adapt to the current environment. Mon musicians have to adjust themselves due to the globalization of Myanmar. There are performances of Mon music in places such as at the Mon Cultural Center, restaurants, and tourist attractions. In order to survive in society, many things need to be changed. The performances have to be shortened and a mixture of Mon music and modern music should be played. However, there are few musicians who are experts in Mon traditional music. It is hoped traditional Mon music will be preserved and developed so that it survives in the Mon society. (Douglas, 2001 : Abstract)

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

From the study of the Mon music in Mottama, the researchers have the following suggestions for future research :

1. There should be an in-depth study on the songs and the techniques of Mon music.
2. There should be a study of the Mon culture both past and present. Also, there should a study of the survivability of Mon music in order to make sure the music remains to benefit future generations
3. There should be a study comparing Mon music in the Union of Myanmar to Mon music in other countries.

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