

# Khaen: The Musical Forms in Ceremony

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## Abstract

The objectives of this study were to study and compare the musical forms of *Khaen* (bamboo free-reed mouthorgan) played in The Lao People's Democratic Republic and Thailand. The comparison of musical forms of *Khaen* in the rites between *Nang Thiam* (the representative spirit) ceremony in Laos and *Lam Song* (the representative spirit) ceremony in Thailand were the same sound modes: *Lai Thang Sun* (medium tone to high tone: delighted rhythm) and *Lai Thang Yao* (medium tone to low tone: sad rhythm). There was a similarity in blowing, tonguing, and fingering; for instance, used wind from blowing, tongue, and fingers to shift volume, accelerate rhythm, and chorus.

**Keywords:** Khaen, musical form, ceremony

## 1. Introduction

*Khaen* is one of the oldest musical instruments in the world. There have been various archeological evidences related to *Khaen*, and the most ancient evidence found was *Lai Jam Lak* image painted on the surface of bronze drum in Vietnam which was more than 2,000 years old. The image was the *Lam* singer and *Khaen* player in the ceremonial clothing for abundance of life. (Wongtet, 2009). There are same sound systems and similar shape of *Khaen* played in the Lao PDR and the northeast of Thailand due to the long lasting cultural exchanges between both countries. *Khaen* is considered as one of the *Mor Lam* (singing) culture's musical instruments (Chonphairot, 1993). *Khaen* is a musical instrument that can make melody and drone. *Khaen* is generally made from *Goo Khaen* wood, the bamboo found in the northeast of Thailand and *Lao Derm* tribes who live along the Mekong River. *Khaen* songs and *Khaen* blowing are in the same culture. There are varieties of tribes living in Laos; therefore, there are different types of *Khaen*; *Khaen 7*, *Khaen 8* and *Khaen 9*, with various playing. In the old days, it was said in Laos that if one was born as a man and he could neither play *Khaen* nor ordain as a monk, he was not a perfect man. (Saisuwan, 2010) *Lao Khaen* is a musical instrument that plays significant role in entertainment, ceremony, and belief. The sound of *Khaen* goes along well with the accent and language used more than any other instruments. (Nettawong, 2002)

*Khaen* has been the most popular musical instrument for *Isaan* people up to now. It has been used for entertainment among friends and families. It was also used as a good company when a man travelling to visit or flirt a lady. Moreover, *Khaen* was played in several kinds of entertainments, such as *Lam Pee Fah*, *Lam Puun*, *Lam Klon*, *Lam Muu*, *Lam Plern*, and *Lam Sing* (kinds of dancing together with singing). *Singers* and *Khaen* players have developed in parallel with ceremonies and beliefs. This can be seen from how they sing while *Khaen* is being played in order to heal sick people, for example, *Lam Song*, *Lam Song*, and *Lam Pee Fah* (kinds of dancing together with singing). Later on, singing has become related to Buddhism. It was about Buddhist tales before it has developed to be played for entertainment; for instance, *Mor Lam Klon* (two singers: male, female and *Khaen* blower) and *Mor Lam Muu* (dance and sing in group). *Khaen* has become such a popular musical instrument because the rhythms relate to the way of villagers' lives. However, *Khaen*'s techniques have been improved to be more westernized currently. People still continue behaving as the original culture of *Khaen* because *Khaen* is a part of people's ceremony and belief, the identity of musical culture of the *Mekong* river basin, the symbol of musical instrument, and praised as the symbol of *Isaan* region. *Khaen* is also the leader of other instruments because it is mainly used in entertainment, rites, festivals and religious ceremonies. (Palangwan, 2002)

I, the researcher of this research, have been interested to study the obstacles and problems of *Khaen* as an old

and ancient musical instrument with its charm and beauty that touch the hearts of Thai and Lao people. *Khaens* have been used to entertain people, and to heal patients; nevertheless, it lacks a man to inherit to blow *Khaen*. Furthermore, when *Khaen* blowers are old and die, the precious *Khaen* blowing techniques go with them. Seriously, *Khaen* songs, played in both *Lam Song* in Thailand and *Nang Thiam* in Laos (both are singing and dancing to cure patients), have not been written in a book to; hence, there is no new generation learn this culture. I have a strong wish to learn the similarities and the differences of *Khaen* played in Laos and in Thailand and to maintain this culture before it disappears.

## 2. Research Objectives

- 1) To study the musical forms of *Khaen* played in Laos and in Thailand;
- 2) To compare the musical forms of *Khaen* played in ceremonies in Laos and in Thailand.

## 3. Methodology

The research of *Khaen: The Musical Forms in Ceremony* is a qualitative research. The data collected was from Vientiane, Laos and Khon Kaen province, Thailand. Purposive sample was drawn in this research with 12-month period of study. The research tools used to collect data were structured and non-structured interviews, participatory and non-participatory observations, and group discussions. The data collected and then was analyzed according to Musicology and Anthropology theory, the Diffusion theory of Culture, and Ethnographic Studies. The collected data was presented in the descriptive analysis form.

## 4. Research Results

### 4.1 The Musical Forms of *Khaen* in Ceremonies in Laos and in Thailand

It was found that healing ceremonies with *Lam Song* in Thailand and *Nang Thiam* in Laos are to mentally treat the patients who are hopeless from their previous traditional treatments and any other kinds of treatments. Their sickness has never been recovered or improved; consequently, *Lam Song* and *Nang Thiam* are the alternative ways of healing the sick. Furthermore, people in northeast of Thailand and in Laos believe that there is spiritual power impact their livelihood, and health. According to Buddhism, in human body consists of body and mind. If the mind is sick, it affects the body and causes depression, upset and sadness in return. If your mind does not feel well, the body will not be able to eat that will cause unhealthy body. The easterners believe that sound body is in a sound mind which is similar to the westerner's concept: Sound mind in a sound body. To help the sick feel better, the ceremonies, *Nang Thiam* and *Lam Song*, may be the good alternatives. Blowing *khaen* in the ceremony in Siengkwang, the Lao PDR was the process that invited the ghosts to dance and sing in human bodies (Rungruang, 2009).

The interesting points of the use of *Khaen* in ceremonies are as follow:

The Musical Forms of *Khaen* in ceremony in Laos;

The musical forms of *Khaen* consist of;

*Khaen* Sound System: *Khaen* used in ceremony is *Khaen* 8 which has 16 different sounds. *Khaen* 8 can make 2 sound systems, including *Lai Thang San* (high tone with joyful rhythm) and *Lai Thang Yao* (medium and low tone with sad rhythm).

*Lai Khaen* (songs):

*Khaen* players themselves will also have their own styles which are not recorded in literal documents. Rhythms are played mainly depend on the intelligence of *Khaen* player's because they can change mode, rhythm, and drone whenever they want to. *Khaen* is played in the rite of *Long Kuang* (annual ceremony from 13 to 15 April) with *Lai Khaen Sutsanaen*, *Lai Thang Chern* and *Lai Sing* (songs).

*Khaen* Blowing Techniques: It takes 7-8 hours to blow *Khaen* in the rite of *Nang Thiam* in Laos; thus, blowing techniques are required with other musical instruments such as drums, castanets and small cymbals to make rhythm funnier and joyful as the hosts wish. Drums, which are used to control the rhythms, are like in Thai music styles that are concise, rousing in order to reach the goal of the ceremony.

### 4.2 The Musical Forms of *Khaen* in Ceremony in Thailand

*Khaen* was used as a device to diagnose naturally both physical and psychological purposes (Phimsen, 1993). The sound from *khaen* improves and alerts the patients' health (Takaoka et al., 2010). The music from the musical instrument called Galmore in Surin, in the northeast of Thailand, also relaxed and entertained the patients (Buathong, 2005). The director of the hospital in Surin province also integrated as an alternative choice to cure (Phimphagun, 2010).

The musical forms of *Khaen* consist of;

*Khaen* Sound System: Diatonic major scale is used in *Lam Song* in Thailand, consisting of C D E F G A and B. The one-tone interval happens in C-D D-E F-G G-A A-B, and semi-tone interval happens in E-F B-C. One *Khaen* can produce 2 sound systems: *Lai Thang San* (joyful melody) and *Lai Thang Yao* (sad melody).

*Lai Khaen* (songs): In general, the musicians use pentatonic with minor diatonic scale which is soft, sweet, sad sound. The song chorus is flexible with short songs that can be repeated over and over. Melody structure comprises 3 parts namely: introduction, theme, and variations. It is amazingly found that we can play 2 keys by only one *Khaen* that is relative key, for instance, Key E minor and Key a minor.

Blowing *Khaen* Techniques rely on each musician's experiences. They may get techniques from observations, or exchanges between musicians and they will adapt to be their own techniques. There are no schools to teach like other music schools, so they have to develop blowing skill themselves. The basic skills needed to blow *Khaen* are tonguing, blowing, fingering, improvising, and droning which depend on a musician's ability. The oftentimes used techniques are blowing, using tongue, using fingers, sucking and inserting keys. There are 3 styles of blowing *Khaen* in the rites namely: *Tai Klawn* (singing and blowing *Khaen* at the same time), *Sub Lum* (singing first and then music afterwards), and Free Style that is musician blow *Khaen* freely. The last style happens with a new musician who ignores the rhythm of song; thus, he can play freely with fun.

#### The Musical Forms of Singing

*Klawn Lam*: There are 3 songs which are sung in *Lam Song* (Thailand): *Lam Yok Kru*, *Lam Siang Thai*, and *Lam Song Klap* (*Lam* means song). The music can directly convey a musician's feeling to the patients and visitors; therefore, the rhythms are warm and welcome to soothe the sick and help they feel better. They sing with saying proverbs at the same time that makes the atmosphere relaxed and happy.

Rhythms: According to the data analyzed, pitches of songs are at medium or alto level. There are slightly change the notes with long slurring that makes us feel friendly.

Versification: A song does not have an introduction, but starts with the content of the song. The rhymes are not fixed but they focus on internal rhymes. One unit of song consists of 4 sentences. The first one is ended with mid-tone word, the second one is ended with high tone word, the next one is ended with falling tone or dead words, and the last one is ended with falling and mid-tone words.

#### 4.3 The Comparison between Musical Forms in Ceremony in Laos and Thailand

##### *Khaen* Musical Forms

Table 1. Khaen sound systems

Laos ( <i>Nang Thiam</i> )	Thailand ( <i>Lam Song</i> )
Singing-There is no singing but praying for the gods instead to come down and join the ceremony; consequently, song, melody, and prosody are not found.	Singing-Singing is at medium or alto level and some time there are slurs in order to soothe the patients. The contents of song transmit the musician's feeling towards the sick in order to relieve their pains. Sometimes this make the patients cry out loud with gladness and happiness. The rhymes of songs are not fixed. Singers can say good words while singing.
Song- <i>Lai Khaen Sutsanaen</i> , <i>Lai Thang Chern</i> and <i>Lai Sing</i> are songs which are sung in the ceremony.	Song- <i>Lai Noi</i> and <i>Lai Yai</i> are sung in the ceremony.
- <i>Lai Khaen Sutsanaen</i> : Key C major with moderato is played. The highest music note is C and the lowest music note is A and ended with perfect fifth of dominant: G and D. The phase of music note is not wide. Music notes are mostly sixteenth notes.	<i>Lai Noi</i> : Song and moderato are begun by octave 8, 3 ranges of G with perfect fifth of D. The highest music note is G, range 2 and the lowest music note is low G. The phase of music note is not wide. Music notes are mostly sixteenth notes and appoggiatura and ended with eighth: range 3 of G with tonic, drone with fifth D dominant that make song completely finished.
- <i>Lai Thang Chern</i> : Key C minor for introduction with rubato is played. The highest music note is F and the lowest music note is B. The phase of music note is not	<i>Lai Yai</i> : Rubato is to introduce the song with fifth notes, D and A. The highest music note is F range 2

Laos ( <i>Nang Thiam</i> )	Thailand ( <i>Lam Song</i> )
<p>wide. Music notes are mostly sixteenth notes then lower the sound by slurring C (tonic) to speed of 70 knocks per minute. Drum, cymbal, and small cymbal will help to accelerate the speed and to go with a musician. The song is ended by slow rhythm.</p>	<p>and the lowest music note is D.</p>
<p><i>-Lai Sing</i>: Key D minor with fast and fun rhythms. The highest music note is D range 3 (bar 28) and the lowest music note is C (bar 4). The phase of music note is wide. Music notes are mostly sixteenth notes. The song is ended by slurring perfect fifth those are G and D.</p>	<p>The phase of music note is not wide. Music notes are mostly sixteenth notes and sextuplet. The song is played repeatedly and ended with perfect fifth: D (Tonic), and A (Dominant).</p>
<p><i>Khaen</i>: No <i>Khaen</i> blowing but sounds of <i>Khaen</i> are from a record player instead. There are 2 systems used in the rite: <i>Lai Thang San</i> (high tone: joyful rhythm) and <i>Lai Thang Yao</i> (medium tone or rather low tone: sad rhythm).</p>	<p><i>Khaen</i>: It is a complete system with diatonic major scale: C D E F G A B. Interval is semi-tone. <i>Lai Thang San</i> (high tone: joyful rhythm) and <i>Lai Thang Yao</i> (medium tone or rather low tone: sad rhythm).</p>

## 5. Suggestions

- 1) To support any organization to use native songs to encourage the sick and the old;
- 2) To exchange music knowledge with other kinds of music;
- 3) To enhance the study of religious rites or tribal activities which affect the way of life of each community;
- 4) To conduct further study about any musical instrument that can be mental treatment.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1 The Musical Forms in Ceremony in Lao PDR and Thailand

*Khaens* in Lao PDR used in ceremonies are consisted of 2 modes; *Lai Thang San* (Short Way Melody), means the mode has quite high tone giving a fun and exciting feeling, and *Lai Thang Yao* (Long Way Melody), means the mode that has medium to quite low tone giving a sad feeling, however if playing with a faster rhythm, it will give a fun feeling as well. *Lai Khaen* (*Khaen's* songs) in the rite of *Long Kuang* during *Nang Thiam* ceremony normally will be started with *Lai Sutsanaen*. The *Lai Sutsanaen* has G A B C as their main modes, while *Lai Thang Chern* is, being used to invite the spirits of angels to participate in the ceremony, and started by the singing before the playing of *Khaen*. Then *Lai Sutsanaen* will be blowing and followed with *Lai Thang Chern*. The other instruments used during this process include *Klong Yao* (drums), Ching (small bells) and small *Chab*. These instruments will be playing over and over again alternately with *Lai Sing*, the fun and exciting song. The techniques every *Khaen* player use are blowing, using tongue and fingers, switching the keys, speeding up the rhythm and using different tempo. The *Khaen* players with higher experiences will be able to insert and sue different tempo very well. Another special skill of the *Khaen* players is the intelligence in solving the immediate situation. This means that they can improvise the *Khaen* playing amazingly.

*Khaens* in Thailand: the modes used are 2; *Lai Thang San* (Short Way Melody), the mode has quite high tone giving a fun and exciting feeling, and *Lai Thang Yao* (Long Way Melody), the mode that has medium to quite low tone giving a sad feeling, however if playing with a faster rhythm, it will give a fun feeling as well. Both modes have their rhythm natural a minor scale giving the sound of sweet and soft. The sound oftentimes gives sad feeling. The rhymes of the songs are short and can be played multiple times or as long as the ceremony is finished. The tone in the beginning is free and will be in the medium to quite fast tone. The structure of the rhythm includes 3 parts; introduction, content and variations. Their *Lai Khaen* is not complicated. The observation of blowing *Khaen* in the ceremony is that every *Khaen* player will keep playing the same rhythm many times until the healing ceremony is completed. The techniques that the players will normally use are blowing, using tongue and fingers, sucking, and inserting the keys. Other than this, each *Khaen* player will have their own different intelligence to blow the *Khaen* along with the ceremony according to their experiences. The playing of *Khaen* along with the singing is consisted of 3 significant ways; blowing along with the singing, blowing as the background, and blowing freely.

*Lam* (Singing): it was not found singing or *Lam* along the healing process in the rite of *Nang Thiam*. *Phaya*

(short good sayings) in the rite of *Lam Song*, singing *Lam* and *Phaya* were found along with the healing process. There are 2 types of singing styles; 1) The Cadence of *Lam Yok Kru*, *Lam Siang Tai* and *Lam Song Klap*. Singing in *Lam Song*, it was found that the voice made was medium or alto. There were not many changes in keys. Sometimes the singer will stress or sing the lyrics slowly and emotionally in order to make the patients agree or feel relaxed. The content of the singing rhymes together with the rhythm can help sending out the feeling or emotion of the singer very well. This helps make the patients releasing their pain. Sometimes the patients will cry with happiness from hearing the words and cadence the singer sings. *Khaen* is played as the background for the singing rhymes. The ceremony also will help create the atmosphere where families and friends coming together to be participate this occasion with the patients who have been sick and felt they need support. Especially in *Isaan* (northeastern locals) where people love entertainment, when the atmosphere is enjoyable, it also impacts the sick body to be improved and be able to recover itself totally. Some of the patients can even get up and dance along with the song during the ceremony. 2) *Phaya* Rhythm is a type of poem that *Isaan* people used in singing during the healing process. It can simply and perfectly communicate with the patients. *Phaya* is a poem where they have simple rhymes, not poetic ones. There are not fixed rhymes to make. The content contains two, three or four sentences. The content itself also is quite simple but has deep meaning. When singing, the singer will know when and where to stress or control their voice, this helps the audience feel more enjoyable and fun. During the rite of *Lam Song*, they do not only focus on singing with the rhymes, but to communicate with the patients and their families by using the rhymes alternately with *Phaya*, the short good sayings. The content is more focused than the singing and dancing like any other *Mor Lam*. Some parts of the singing are rhymes. The first step, they will pay respect to the teacher by using the *Klon Lam Yok Kru*. Like any others, there is only one teacher that they will have to pay respect and invite to join the ceremony. The singing song also uses the same one, but the difference is when they do the casting lots or healing because the sickness of each patient has may be different. There are 3 characteristics of *Phaya* versification (used in ceremony); *Phaya* with rhymes, *Phaya* without rhymes, and alternated *Phaya* that has both rhymes and without rhymes.

#### The Comparison of Musical Forms in Ceremony in Lao PDR and Thailand

*Khaen* Sound System *Khaens* used in ceremony both in Thailand and Lao PDR has very similar sound system. *Khaen 8* is usually used. There are two modes of *Khaen* used; 1) *Lai Thang San* (Short Way Melody), the mode that has quite high tone, including *Lai Sutsanaen* (G A C D E and high G). *Lai Thang San* (Short Way Melody) gives fun and exciting feeling. It makes the audience feels fresh and wants to dance or follow the steps. 2) *Lai Thang Yao* (Long Way Melody) is the mode that has medium to quite low tone. *Lai Khaen* (*Khaen's* songs): it is suitable for playing when a woman is a singer in the ceremony. In this mode, it includes *Lai Khaen* and the keys used in ceremony, including *Lai Noi* (D F G A C and high D), *Lai Yai* (A C D E G and high A). *Lai Thang Yao* gives the audience the sad feeling, but if it is played faster, it can also give a fun and exciting feeling. Therefore, the sound systems of *Khaen* used in the rite of *Nang Thiam* and *Lam Song* are not different.

*Lai Khaen* (*Khaen's* songs): is how to produce a unique rhythm of *Khaen* following the ones written by each of the *Khaen* player, which also could be in different tones. Mostly, *Khaen* players will play songs according to their thoughts and will improvise new songs immediately. However, *Khaen* players themselves will also have their own main cadence. To conduct the cadence or *Lai Khaen* (*Khaen's* songs) mainly is depended on the intelligence each *Khaen* player has. In the rite of *Nang Thiam* of Lao PDR, *Khaen* is played during the rite of *Long Kuang* or *Long Paam*.

The techniques that the *Khaen* players use are blowing, using tongue and fingers, switching the keys or sound modes. *Khaens* can normally adjust their sounds in 2 different levels or modes. The techniques used to speed up or making different tempo or rhythm, the *Khaen* player who have a lot of experiences will be able to insert and make different tempo or rhythm very well. Another excellent skill that a *Khaen* player should have is the intelligence in solving immediate problem which is improvising the *Khaen* playing with a precious sound and continue the performance effectively. All of this depends on their experiences collected.

In the rite of *Lam Song*, mostly *Khaen* players have their own various techniques due to their decades of years of experiences. The often used techniques are blowing, using tongue and fingers, sucking, and inserting keys. Moreover, each of the *Khaen* players may have their own intelligence and ability to play this musical instrument differently. Both modes have their rhythm natural a minor scale giving the sound of sweet and soft. The sound oftentimes gives sad feeling. The lyrics of the songs are short and can be played multiple times or as long as the ceremony is finished. The tone in the beginning is free and will be from medium to quite fast tone. The structure of the rhythm includes 3 parts; introduction, content and variations.

Singing: During the healing ceremony or the rite of *Nang Thiam*, it was not found that there was singing along

with process. It was only words of praying and speaking to invite and communicate with angels or spirits that *Nang Thiam* sacrificed to come down and join the healing process. Blowing *Khaen* in the ceremony was a tool used to invite the angels or spirits to heal the patients only. The musical forms of singing during the rite of *Lam Song* were sung in the medium tone which is alto. There were not many changes in keys. There are some parts that the singer will stress or control the voice in order to help making the patients agree or feel relaxed. The content of the singing rhymes together with the rhythm can help sending out the feeling or emotion of the singer very well. This helps make the patients releasing their pain. Sometimes the patients will cry with happiness from hearing the words and cadence the singer sings. *Khaen* is played as the background for the singing, and the singing rhymes sound more precious. Singing in the rite of *Lam Song* is consisted of 3 parts, including *Lam Yok Kru* (paying respect to the teacher), *Lam Siang Tai* (casting lots) and *Lam Song Klap* (returning). The characteristic of the singing is *Klon Yern* which has no flexible rhymes. Sometimes *Phaya* is inserted along with the singing.

## 6.2 Suggestions

Suggestions for benefiting the research results

- 1) The related government or agencies shall promote the use of local music and songs to heal and support the patients;
- 2) The academic institutes shall support further researches on local music and songs for the benefits of others and other groups;
- 3) The research results shall be used to plan to help the patients with mental issues or elders;
- 4) The research results shall be further exchanged and promoted towards the musical society around the world;
- 5) Suggestions for further studies;
- 6) Study the music played in ceremony in each nation with the Southeast Asian countries;
- 7) Study the effectiveness of using music to heal the patients with different type of sickness within and out of the hospital;
- 8) Study the music used in ceremony of different tribes;
- 9) Study the music used in religious ceremony;
- 10) Study the local music in each area and how it impacts their livelihood;
- 11) Study the impacts of each musical instrument towards mental health issue treatment.

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**Appendix (Thailand)**



Figure 1. Lum Song ceremony to soothe a patient in Khon Kaen, Thailand

Source: Photo taken by Prakrit Yaowaphan on 12/3/2012



Figure 2. Long Kwang ceremony in Khon Kaen, Thailand with an author on the left

Source: Photo taken by Prakrit Yaowaphan on 4/13/2013



Figure 3. The participants are dancing to thank ghosts who come to cure the sick

Source: Photo taken by Prakrit Yaowaphan on 4/13/2013



Figure 4. A Singer and a khaen blower welcome the visitors to join the process

Source: Photo taken by Prakrit Yaowaphan on 4/16/2013

**Appendix (The Lao PDR)**

Figure 5. Long Kwang ceremony in the Lao PDR

Source: Photo taken by Prakrit Yaowaphan on 1/12/2013



Figure 6. The other musical instruments were played with khaen, author was on the left

Source: Photo taken by Prakrit Yaowaphan on 1/15/2013

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