

# Kammu Gongs and Drums (I)<sup>1</sup>

## THE KETTLEGONG, GONGS, AND CYMBALS

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### Origin of the Kettlegong

The kettlegong, yàan (fig. 1), is the most highly treasured musical instrument among the Yuan Kammu in Northern Laos.<sup>2</sup> Since it is a precious object of lasting value, the yàan is a treasured possession as well as a sign of wealth.

The general opinion among the Kammu people is that yàan originally were purchased in Burma, where they were manufactured by a people the Kammu call Lwà.<sup>3</sup> It is also said that yàan were made long ago in a Lwà village located in the Yuan area in Laos. Another people, called "Màan,"<sup>4</sup> are also supposed to have been makers of yàan. The Kammu word for kettlegong, yàan, closely resembles "Ya. ng" = Karen of "Ya. ng dae. ng," which has been used to designate kettlegongs in Thailand.<sup>5</sup> If these words are related to one another remains to be shown.

Old Kammu people, however, say that yàan were made long ago by a Kammu culture hero, ctaŋ.<sup>6</sup> These yàan were cast in a cave, which is now called Tkóŋj Tkéel after the nearest Lamet villages, and some of them are supposed still to be there. Since these yàan and the cave are said to be cursed, nobody has ever succeeded in seeing them. This appears to be a wide-spread saying and similar legends are known to the Karen in Burma.<sup>7</sup> It is a fact, however, that kettlegongs and other treasures often have been buried, thrown into rivers or hidden in caves, either in order to protect them in times of war or because they have been considered cursed.

The technique for casting kettlegongs is possibly related in the Kammu story of Nii Kràan, 'Lazy Nii'. One part of this long story may be taken to describe the cire perdue casting technique. Here fol-

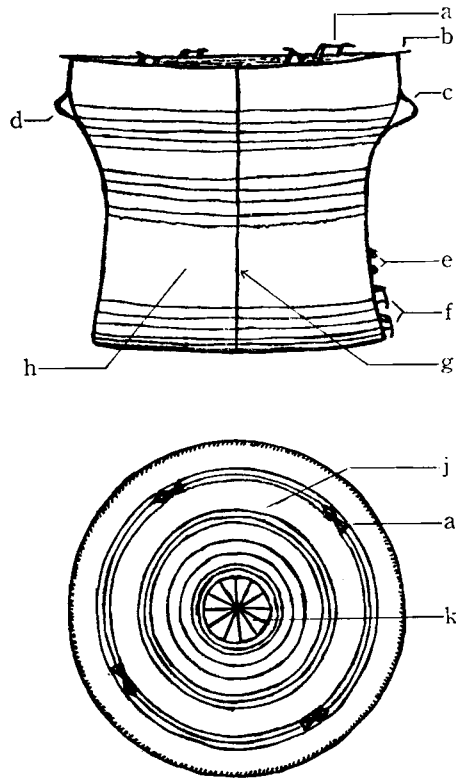


Fig. 1 The kettlegong, yàan.

- a. tríik=frog
- b. kmáj khéε=sword's edge
- c,d. hrməy=ear
- e. 'yíak scáaη=elephant's excrement
- f. scáaη=elephant
- g. pləəη=seam
- h. tóo=body (the opening is called tóη=mouth)
- j. nàa=face
- k. mət=eye, or mət prí=sun
- l. trnàm=beater

lows a summary of this part of the story:

One day Lazy Ñii went to collect honey with his friends. He told them to take the honey and give him the wax. Afterwards he made a yàan out of this wax. When he beat it, wondrous things happened and the sound spread all over the land. In the evening he crushed it and kneaded the wax into a ball. He made a new yàan every day until his parents began to wonder what he was up to, and sent the district headman to spy on him. Having thus found out what Lazy Ñii was doing every day, his parents hid in the attic of their house with some rice-water and a casting-net. When Lazy Ñii returned home with his little brother, whom he had been asked to look after, he made a wax yàan inside the house. From their hiding-place his parents first poured the rice-water over it, and then threw the casting-net over it. When Lazy Ñii tried to crush it as usual, it had become so hard that this was impossible. "It had become a real yàan now. The yàan that we still use".<sup>8</sup>

When Lazy Ñii in the story made a yàan of wax, he played in a way that Kammu children still do. They sometimes make models of yàan for fun, using wax as modelling clay.

#### Kammu Classification of Kettlegongs

The most important classification of yàan is according to material. The yàan cast of equal parts of copper and "silver" (=tin?) are patina green and have a soft, reverberating sound.<sup>9</sup> They are said to be the oldest, but this should not be understood as a measure of the actual age of the specimen in question. Any yàan made of this alloy is called an old yàan whether it has been in the same family for generations or more recently made.<sup>10</sup> The yàan which consist of about 1/4 "silver" and 3/4 copper are called the newest. They have a greyish color, and a sharper sound. The groups are:

yàan príim	=old style yàan,
yàan sáat káarj	=middle style yàan,
yàan hmmè	=new style yàan.

Another ground for classification is the size of the yàan. The diameter is measured in palm-breadths and there are at least four recognized sizes:<sup>11</sup>

nàa rók	= six palm-breadths (ca. 65 cm),
nàa cét	= seven „ (ca. 76 cm),
nàa péét	= eight „ (ca. 87 cm),

nàa kàw = nine palm-breadths (ca. 98 cm).

On four places on the periphery of the face there are frog figures (fig. 1a).<sup>12</sup> There may be one frog, two frogs or three frogs on top of each other in each place. Yàan are therefore also classified according to the number of frogs:

mòoy pò = one frog (fig. 1),  
 sṵṵṵ pò = two frogs (fig. 2b),  
 sáam pò = three frogs (fig. 2a).

Middle and new style yàan normally have three elephant figures in graded sizes on the side (fig. 1f)<sup>13</sup> as well as other figures, which the Kammu call elephant's excrement (fig. 1e).<sup>14</sup> On old style yàan, the same kind of figures may appear, but other figures also occur, such as cicadas or rice-flowers. For old yàan there are type names depending on which figures they have on the side, but also other characteristics are used for naming them. The Kammu recognize at least the following types:<sup>15</sup>

yàan ràaṅ ṅó = rice-flower yàan (fig. 2b),  
 yàan ràaṅ liāṅ = flower-affair yàan (7-8 palm-breadths wide),  
 yàan ràaṅ lṵṵ = forgotten-flower yàan (no figures on the side),  
 yàan ràaṅ tò = calling-flower yàan  
 yàan mèeṅ wàaṅ = cicada yàan (fig. 2a),  
 yàan càawáaṅ = female yàan (6 palm-breadths wide, more pronounced waist),  
 yàan Tkṵṵṵ Tkéel = yàan made in the villages Tkṵṵṵ and Tkéel.

#### The Soul of the Yàan

Each yàan is considered to have a soul, hrmàal, of the same kind as human beings. It receives a sacrifice each time the yàan has been used. The nature of these sacrifices are different according to the situation. The soul of the yàan may also be strengthened by smearing some blood from a hen on its "sun" and figures. This is equivalent to the practice of coating the knee-caps of a person with blood to strengthen his soul. If people find reason to believe that the soul has left the yàan, as a soul can leave a person and thus cause a sickness, it will be called back. It is strengthened by the tying of strings to the animal figures on the face and on the side of the yàan, as it hangs in its playing position.

This is equivalent to the tying of a piece of string around a person's wrists in similar situations.

Apart from having *hrmàal*, every *yàan* also has *pkùn*, a concept which presupposes that the thing or the person has at least some of the following characteristics: great age, power, wealth (economically, socially and/or culturally). Just like rice or people of high rank the *yàan* has very big *pkùn*. The older the *yàan*, the bigger its *pkùn*. Because of its big *pkùn* it is necessary to treat the *yàan* with respect,<sup>16</sup> not because its *pkùn* is evil or dangerous, but because it requires a humble attitude. Bad treatment of things with *pkùn* may lead to bad harvests and bad luck in all undertakings in the owner's family.

Each *yàan* also has *bún*, which may be approximately translated as "luck". Only time can show whether a *yàan* has good or bad *bún*. If a *yàan* of the type *ràaŋ liaŋ*, 'flower-affair', has good *bún* it will help the owners to have good harvests, health, money and many children. It will have good *liãŋ*, 'affairs' 'happenings'. If it has bad *bún* it will make the owners unlucky in these respects, and may also lead them to make mistakes and to be distrusted or falsely accused. They will be in trouble and have difficulties all the time. A *yàan* with good *bún* is good to possess, but the owners may try to get rid of a *yàan* with bad *bún*.

#### Cursed *Yàan*

Every *yàan* thus has *hrmàal* (soul), *pkùn* ("power") and good or bad *bún* ("luck"). Since the *yàan* are made out of metals which are taken from under the ground every *yàan* is ultimately owned by the *róoy yàk*, 'demon spirits'. These are powerful spirits who own everything which is dug out of mines.<sup>17</sup> Most *yàan* that humans use, are those which a demon spirit has allowed people to have.<sup>18</sup> Occasionally a *yàan*, which comes into the hands of people, is still under the direct control of its owner spirit. Such *yàan* are said to be cursed and are called *yàan rêm*.<sup>19</sup>

That a *yàan* is cursed becomes known when bad misfortunes, which cannot be otherwise explained, strike the human owner or his relatives. In theory, any kind of *yàan* can be cursed, but the risk is considered to be greatest with *yàan* of the oldest type. *Yàan* of the 'rice-flower' and 'female' types are never known to be cursed, however. Cursed *yàan* are rather of the 'flower-affair' and 'T*kóŋŋ*-T*kéel*' types.

Occasionally an individual *yàan* may be possessed by other spirits. *Yàan* of great age may thus be cursed by a spirit which resides in old and valuable objects:

Strangers came to sell a yàan and they were in a hurry to sell it. After two or three months, the purchasing family became unlucky. They had got the 'tiger spirit', and many people died. The villagers drove them out of the village, since their souls were eating people.<sup>8</sup>

The róoy rwàay, 'tiger spirits', are evil spirits. If a yàan or some other old object, should happen to be the residing place of such a spirit, its owner may become possessed. The possessed person will not get ill, but people around him will fall ill and die. It is said that a person who becomes ill for this reason, speaks in tongues and reveals whose soul it is that has eaten his soul.<sup>20</sup> In the case related above, a whole family was driven out of the village. The best way to get rid of the evil spirit is to get rid of the object in which it is dwelling. This explains why the original owners of the yàan were in such a hurry to sell it.

Another way to get rid of a dangerous spirit, is to acquire certain objects which have the power of rescuing people from spirits. One such object is the yàan without figures on its side, the yàan ràaŋ l̀òc 'forgotten-flower yàan'. It is thought that the maker of such a yàan forgot to put figures on its side. By analogy, a spirit who is about to punish or enter a person, who owns such a yàan, will forget his intention. The word l̀òc 'forgotten' in the name of this type of yàan is said to imply the word kl̀òc 'not getting'. Therefore the owners of this type of yàan cannot expect it to provide better harvests, better luck in hunting or the like. Kl̀òc is often combined with the word ɲàr 'still, quiet, calm'. Kl̀òc ɲàr, which is said to be characteristic of the situation of the owners of a yàan ràaŋ l̀òc, is thus both advantageous and disadvantageous.<sup>21</sup>

Its opposite is the yàan ràaŋ t̀òc 'calling-flower yàan', which is considered to call things as a hunter calls birds or deer. This type of yàan is good for getting desired things, but bad since unwanted things are also attracted by it.

Among the spirits which may be connected with the yàan are the róoy rk'l̀ak, spirits who get infuriated when traditional marriage rules are set aside. Here follows the concluding part of a memorate dealing with a man who married too close a relative:

Two or three years after he had married her, they got the spirit rk'l̀ak. It gnawed on their yàan until it got blunt at the edges. The teethmarks on that yàan were just like those on a pumpkin when a rat has gnawed at it.<sup>8</sup>

### Symbolism of the Animal and Plant Figures

The connection between rice-flowers on certain yàan and farming is evident. Rice is the most important crop in Kammu agriculture. Apart from having big pkùn, rice also has a soul, hrmàal, just like people.

Some yàan have elephant figures on the side. In Kammu tradition elephants have a high status and are regarded with deep respect. Just as the yàan, they have big pkùn.

The cicada, which appears on some yàan, is connected with the harvest. The cry of this cicada, krwàaŋ,<sup>22</sup> is one of the important events of the 10th month of the Kammu calendar. This is just before the harvest begins.<sup>23</sup>

The 'king of toads' plays an important role in several Kammu tales, but there is nothing to indicate a relationship between this legendary toad and the yàan.

Toads, ròk, are used for food, but no special meaning appears to be connected with the eating of them. The toad is also connected with the weather. It is said that if one plays with a toad, the sky will get red and dark, foreboding a storm.

A certain frog, kirtòr, is heard during the sowing season. The Kammu say that this frog calls the rain, and rain is definitely welcome when the sowing is completed. The Yuan Kammu do not, however, use the yàan for calling the rain.<sup>24</sup>

There is a more consistent interpretation of the frog figures, namely that they represent the spirit who owns the yàan, the róoy yàk. They are called the underlings of this spirit.<sup>25</sup>

As was mentioned a róoy yàk now and then manifests itself in a yàan. That this is the case becomes known when misfortunes, which cannot be explained in any other way, happen to the owner of a yàan or to his family. The evil róoy yàk may in such a case be driven out of the yàan in a rather violent manner: the frog figures are broken off from the yàan, and then thrown away into the forest. In order to make them disappear for good, and thus also the evil róoy yàk, they are thrown towards the west, where the sun sets.

### The Gongs and the Cymbals

The best gongs are reported to come from Burma. Although the Yuan Kammu know of the flat gong, which they call pàan, the bossed gong is preferred. This is a medium-deep gong which is made in several sizes.<sup>26</sup> The Kammu measure the diameter in number of palm-breadths.<sup>11</sup> There are two main types of bossed gongs, kòŋ:

Rpàaη kòoη = 6-9 palm-breadths in diameter (appr. 50 cm and larger)

Mòoη kòoη = 1-5 palm-breadths (less than appr. 50 cm).

The large variety of bossed gong, rpàaη, is nearly as important as the kettlegong but appears to be rarer. Like the kettlegong the rpàaη are owned by the 'demon spirits', róoy yàk. The pkùn, "power", of the rpàaη is slightly inferior to that of the kettlegong. Therefore it is not necessary to sacrifice to the rpàaη, and rpàaη are said not to become cursed. They are considered to be old, but are less valuable than old yàan. The small variety of bossed gong, mòoη,<sup>27</sup> is treated much more casually than the rpàaη. The mòoη has no pkùn (or very small pkùn). Its economical value is much less than that of the rpàaη.

The mòoη always goes together with a pair of brass cymbals, créεη. Créεη are two-handed cymbals with a rim and a central boss. They are made in sizes corresponding to those of the mòoη. Suitable créεη fit exactly inside their mòoη. A pair of créεη which fit a mòoη of three palm-breadths are almost exactly 24 cm in diameter (the rim being 6 cm and the boss 12 cm).

#### Ownership

Kettlegongs and gongs represent a considerable economic value, and a family's wealth is estimated by how many of these they own. But of course, other valuable objects are also counted, as cattle and livestock.

The kettlegong is the most valuable of these metal instruments. The value depends on its age and material. A kettlegong of the oldest type is estimated to be worth about two hundred buffaloes, which means that its value is inestimable. The newest type is equal to the cost of two buffaloes. After the kettlegong comes the rpàaη (larger and older gong) and then the mòoη (smaller gong).

Gongs are often used as money and debts may be paid off with a gong. Kettlegongs are more seldom used in this manner, but they have occasionally been used to pay off large debts, or, recently, sold to produce capital to invest in cattle.

The kettlegong is not used for a bride-price, but it is known to have been used for a dowry. More commonly gongs serve as dowry.<sup>28</sup> In one particular case, a kettlegong was bought for a knot of hair. This is said to have occurred about a century ago. It is possible that this was regular practice in older times, for gongs are also said to have been paid for with hair.<sup>29</sup>

The majority of old yàan and rpàaη are inherited goods which the whole lineage group is free to use. The mòoη, which are cheaper, change



owners more commonly. It is not every lineage group that owns a yàan, but it is not uncommon for a lineage group to own at least two yàan. Wealthy families, which have inherited or been able to buy more yàan, may own ten or more. Depending on its size, a Kammu village may hold from six to about fifty yàan.

Thus yàan (and rpaan) can be bought or sold freely, but it is traditionally considered best to keep instruments which have been inherited. At certain ceremonies, at which the ancestor spirits are considered to be present, all such inherited goods must be shown to them, to prove that nothing has been wasted away.

Though everybody has access to the yàan in their lineage group, the instruments may sometimes be the private property of the man who has inherited them or bought them. If a family, which does not possess a yàan, needs one for a special ceremony, they cannot borrow it. Instead a yàan-owner, who is related to them, will lend them his yàan. He will do so without being asked, in order to show his friendliness. This is an act of major social importance.

#### Storing the Yàan and the Gongs

During the intervals between the occasions when a yàan is used, it is stored in the forest. A flat area in a valley is chosen for this purpose and such a storing place is called hnlùk yàan. The Kammu do not bury their yàan, since they are of the opinion that the damp earth damages the sound quality.<sup>30</sup>

When a yàan is stored in the forest, it is laid either on three pieces of wood or on three stones, so that two of these support the heavy upper part and the remaining one supports the lighter bottom end. These props are about twenty centimeters high, so that the yàan is kept well above the ground. Often a fence is built around the storing place.

In Kammu oral tradition, queer things are said to have happened to a certain yàan, while it was stored away in the forest:<sup>31</sup>

One family had stored their yàan in the forest close to their field. One day they found that some of their rice had been eaten. Believing that it had been eaten by wild boars, they followed the trail into the forest. It was the yàan that had bitten off the rice plants and brought it along to make a nest for itself.<sup>8</sup>

A strange or unnatural thing that happens to a yàan is regarded as an omen that something bad will happen to the family who owns it. It is thus said that if water, which cannot be explained as rain-water, is found in a stored-away yàan, the yàan has a presentiment that misfortune will strike the owners. The water is the tears of the yàan and also

implies that the family will cry in the future. As a precaution, people who find that their yàan contains water, will hold a buffalo ceremony.

Although the valuable yàan are left without protection in the forest for the main part of the year, those who would venture to steal a yàan are very few:

A long time ago strangers came to our village to spend the night there. The following day they walked back and forth in the forest. Several months later people from another village came to ask us if some family had lost a yàan. They had caught a gang of thieves, who among other things had a yàan. This proved to be true, and the yàan came back. This shows that it is no use to steal a yàan, people say.<sup>8</sup>

The rpàaŋ may be kept hanging in the common-house, but just as often, rpàaŋ are stored in the forest. Like the yàan, a rpàaŋ is never laid flat on the ground for fear that it may lose its sound. It is either placed vertically with a piece of wood on either side for support, or laid in a slanting position with a stone or wooden piece under one side.

The m̀dòŋ and créεŋ, which are used more often, are normally stored in the loft of the barn. The pair of cymbals are laid over each other flat on the floor, and are covered with the corresponding m̀dòŋ.

#### The Use the Yàan

The yàan is never played purely for entertainment. Apart from testing its sound when traded, a yàan is used on rather few occasions of great ritual importance. These are all ceremonies which are performed by individual families, and at which the ancestor spirits are considered to be present. The yàan is played in order to call the spirits of the ancestors. Despite its importance, the playing of the yàan is not limited to special functionaries. Anybody is allowed to beat them: men, women and even children.

When the yàan is played it is always suspended rather close to the ground or the floor, so that its face is vertical. The player sits on a low stool or squats down in front of it.<sup>32</sup> Both its handles consist of two loops, but only one such loop is used for hanging the yàan. Suspended in this manner its face is exactly vertical, the body is perfectly horizontal, and the yàan can swing freely. When it is played out-doors the branch or rack, from which the yàan is suspended, should not be too stiff. The rope by which it is hung, should be at least two meters long. Hung up in this fashion, the yàan produces a soft, resonant sound, síaŋ píŋ, which is preferred to the sharper, stopped sound, síaŋ khát, which will result

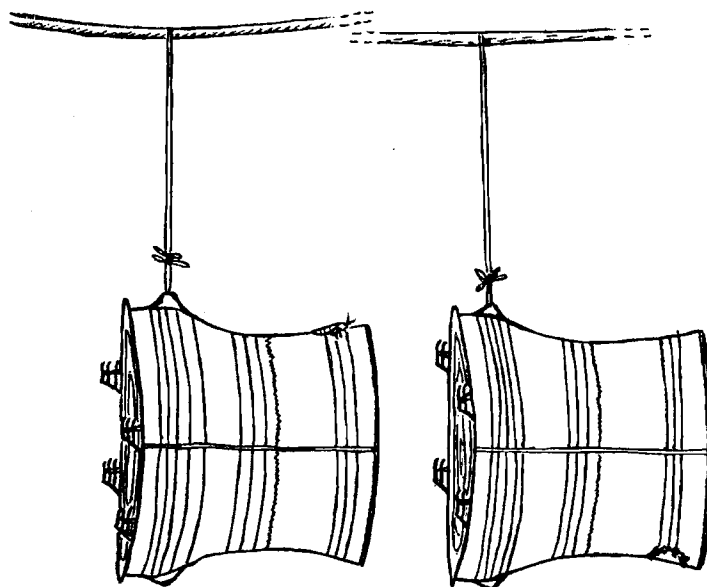


Fig. 2 a. Cicada yàan suspended for use on happy occasion.  
 b. Rice-flower yàan suspended for use at funeral.

from a stiff branch and a shorter rope.

The occasions listed below appear to be the only ones on which the yàan is played among the Yuan Kammu. They do not play the yàan in order to call rain or in war-fare.<sup>33</sup> Since the Yuan Kammu do not settle at the field while the rice is cultivated, they never bring their yàan there. This also explains why the yàan is not used in ceremonies accompanying the initiation of work in the new fields.<sup>34</sup>

During the sowing season and during the harvest, it is taboo to play the yàan (and rpàan). It is in fact taboo even to touch them. If need arises to use them, for instance at a funeral, special precautions must be undertaken in order to suspend the taboo.

### Funerals

On the occasion of the demise of a family member some of the men immediately go into the forest to fetch all the yàan (and rpàan, if any) which the family owns. If they pass a hill or a high place on the way back to the village, they stop and beat the yàan there. This is to inform people in other villages that somebody has departed this life. Relatives may recognize the sound of a particular yàan, and if they know that somebody has been ill recently, they are able to guess who has died. In this case the yàan are hung from the branch of a tree or simply held up

by hand.<sup>35</sup> Since the men are in a hurry, they may beat the yàan with their bare hands. As soon as they arrive back in the village, they suspend the yàan from a rack which is erected below the stairs of the house of the deceased. Here the yàan are beaten again. The purpose is also now to spread the message that somebody has died.

The burial takes place on the second or third day. On the evening before the burial the relatives, who have kept a vigil, sing the lònḡ ḡòr, the song which guides the spirit of the deceased on its way to the village of the dead. During this long song the younger people stay by their yàan without beating them. Inside the house, the master of ceremonies signals the end of the song by beating two hoes against each other. The elders in the house start to sing dirges and to cry, while the younger people resume beating the yàan. They keep on playing the whole night, but pause at midnight, when the guiding song is repeated. Early the following morning, the song is sung for the third time and the yàan are quiet till the song finishes.

To the sound of the yàan the body is then laid out for burial. Normally a piece is scraped off from the base of a yàan, wrapped in cloth and laid on the body, to be interred with it.<sup>36</sup> Cases are known when a yàan of a rich man has been destroyed and left on his grave.<sup>37</sup> When the funeral procession, which takes the body to the graveyard, has gone out of sight of the house, the beating of the yàan ceases.<sup>38</sup>

After the burial, one yàan will be carried into the house and placed where the body of the deceased has been lying. At the following meal a certain kind of leaf is placed on the yàan, which now stands upright, and on the leaf some food is arranged. This sacrifice of banana-flowers and a piece of a cooked crab is for the spirit of the deceased, for the new ancestor spirit. During the following ten-day week, this yàan will serve as an altar on which a small part of each daily meal is sacrificed.

If more than one yàan was used during the funeral ceremonies, the remaining yàan will be carried to the common-house. Here the soul of the yàan will receive a sacrifice consisting of rice-water, i.e. water in which rice has been washed. In every household a couple of bamboo-containers are kept for saving such water. At this sacrifice some water is poured on the "sun" in the centre of the yàan and a prayer for more yàan and a good future is chanted.<sup>39</sup> Afterwards all members of the local lineage group join in a ritual hair-washing outside the house of the deceased, using ricewater.<sup>40</sup> The yàan in the common-house is then returned to the storing place in the forest.

Early in the morning of the eleventh day counted from the demise, the yàan, which has functioned as an altar in the house, is also carried to the common-house. Here its soul receives the rice-water sacrifice and

the same prayer is repeated. The yàan is then carried to its storing place.

If a person has died abroad, or far away from the village, a ceremony will also be held. In that case his belongings may be placed in the house and the relatives will sing dirges. A yàan may be brought in and laid on its side on the floor, but it will not be played.<sup>41</sup>

### The Hot Playing Manner

At a funeral, each yàan is suspended so that the figures on its side point down towards the ground (fig. 2b). This is called to hang the yàan "the wrong way".

The face of the yàan is easily bent if it is struck too hard. In order to prevent this a padded drum-stick, trnàm, with a very short handle (20 cm or even less) is used. At a funeral the drum-stick consists of a pomelo fruit (*Citrus grandis*) fastened to a short wooden stick. It produces a very soft sound.

If the yàan is beaten on the way to the village, the bare hand may be used. At funerals, the rpàaŋ may also be beaten with a pomelo fruit or by hand. Smaller rpàaŋ may be held in the hand, while the larger and heavier ones are suspended like the yàan.

The yàan (and rpàaŋ) are beaten fast, tám ràn, either in succession or in alternation, trsúhsís. This playing manner consists of series of relatively rapid and evenly stressed strokes in the centre of the yàan's face (ex. 1).

The fast playing is called síaŋ há, (síaŋ wàar or síaŋ ròon), 'hot sound', and it implies danger and haste.<sup>42</sup> The word "hot" is also used for other things and means 'unpleasant'.<sup>43</sup>

### Happy Occasions

Other than for funerals, yàan are used on occasions which the Kammu consider to be of a happy nature. These occasions are: testing a yàan before buying it, buffalo ceremonies and house-building feasts.

The oldest types of yàan are too expensive for average people to be able to buy, newer yàan change owners from time to time. A person may decide to sell a yàan in order to invest in cattle or in order to pay off a large debt. There are also more or less specialized yàan-traders going from village to village. Before buying a yàan the customer will *test* it carefully. If the transaction takes place at his village, the yàan will be tested in the surrounding forest. If it takes place in the seller's village, it may be tested in the common-house.

The customer will beat the yàan and examine it carefully. He will also test its sound-quality by walking away, about half an hour, to check

if the sound carries that far, and if it is resonant enough. A good yàan should have a certain amount of reverberation, kmptɿ. The partial one octave below the tone produced by a blow in the centre, should be clearly audible, but not so strong as to muffle the sound. This is best perceived at a distance.

When a yàan is to change owners, it is common to call a person who is skilful in repairing yàan which have lost their sound. Using a small wooden club he works over the surface of such a yàan until an acceptable sound is obtained. If the face is bent so that it bulges outwards, he presses it down with his foot till it becomes flat. If the face is bent inwards the yàan is laid upside down on a hard but shock-absorbing substance, preferably the husks left over from rice-pounding. By hitting the backside of the face carefully with a wooden log, the face is hammered flat. Only a few persons know how to accomplish such repair work.

After the deal has been concluded, the soul of the yàan receives a sacrifice which consists of the blood of a hen smeared on the "sun" and the animal figures. Feathers are also stuck in the blood. The seller prays, asking the soul of the yàan to stay with him, and expressing his hope that he can buy the yàan back someday. The customer's prayer expresses his wishes for a peaceful life and good fortune.

When there is need for a family to placate the ancestor spirits or to ask for their help in a difficult situation, a *buffalo ceremony* will be arranged. The fact that a long time has passed since the previous buffalo ceremony was held may sometimes be reason enough. Also on the first or second anniversary of a funeral, the family of the deceased will stage a buffalo ceremony. With this ceremony the many taboos the family has had to observe will cease. The buffalo ceremony is thus the concern of an individual family, but for the actual ceremony the whole local lineage group is present. During the ceremony, the ancestor spirits are called to come and eat the sacrificed buffalo. In the invocation they are explicitly asked to come and listen to the sound of the yàan. For the ceremony all inherited precious objects, including yàan and rpàaŋ, are brought together so that the ancestor spirits may see that they have been well taken care of.

The yàan are placed in the family's living-house. Normally they are suspended from the bars by which they were carried into the village. The bars are laid over the crossbeams in the house and the yàan suspended from them. Also rpàaŋ may be suspended in this fashion. The yàan and rpàaŋ are kept in the house for one or two ten-day weeks. They may be played any time during this period, but especially on the day the buffalo sacrifice takes place. That day a few drops of blood of

the slain buffalo is smeared on the yàan as a sacrifice. Before the yàan are returned to the forest they may be stored in the commonhouse for one night.<sup>44</sup>

Any time while the yàan are in the house, blood may be smeared on them to strengthen their souls. The yàan will not be carried away until they receive the sacrifice consisting of hen's blood and feathers, and a prayer has been said.

Also at *house-building feasts*, the yàan are brought into the new house and are suspended between the cross-beams. This time, however, the ancestor spirits are not called upon to come. The yàan and rpaaj are kept for two or three ten-day weeks and played often during the festivities. When the feasting period is over, the yàan are placed in the common-house for one night or at least for a few hours. There they receive the hen's blood and feathers sacrifice, and prayer, before being stored away in the forest again.

#### The Cold Playing Manner

On happy occasions each yàan is suspended so that the figures on its side point upwards, "the right way" (fig. 2a). The drum-stick is made of fern-root wrapped in cloth and fastened on a short stick.

The yàan is beaten slowly, *tám yàal*, and in a more elaborate way than during funerals. This is called the "cold" playing manner, *śaŋ yèn* or *śaŋ ɲàr*, and is considered pleasant.

The cold playing manner starts with four rather slow blows in a circle around the centre of the face. There appears to be no precise rule as to where these blows should land (ex. 2a). This is followed by a number of slow blows in the centre (ex. 2b). Here the partial one octave below the main tone is clearly audible. On a good yàan, according to Kammu taste, the lower partial is strong enough to dominate for a while. The amount of time between these slow blows in the centre varies. Evidently it is dependent on the strength of the lower partial: when it has died out it is time for the next blow.

After about 3-6 slow blows in the centre a series of faster blows are delivered, also in the centre. This is called *kmtlan* and consists of one strong, one weak, and one strong (ex. 2c). The initial pattern with slow blows is then repeated.

This pattern may be embellished by the addition of contrasting high-pitched sounds. This is called 'scraping', *tám kncréh*, and is obtained by hitting the side of the yàan's body with the finger-nails of the left hand. The yàan is struck where it is at its widest, approximately 15 cm from the face.

The rpaaj are also beaten in the cold manner, but to the best of

our knowledge, it is only beaten on the boss.

If a family owns several yàan they are either played in unison or one after the other. It is possible for one player to beat two yàan at the same time.

The use of the kettlegong among the Ûu Kammu is mentioned by Roux, but unfortunately he did not describe how it was played.<sup>45</sup> The most detailed description of the playing technique is given by de Gironcourt.<sup>46</sup> He states that his description concerns the "Kha" of northern Laos. Since "Kha" is a term indiscriminately applied to all the minority groups there, it is far from certain that these "Kha" were Kammu people.<sup>47</sup> The possibility remains, however, and if they were Kammu, they were probably from the Ûu or Mèe areas, for the research was carried out close to Luang Prabang. What de Gironcourt found was a playing technique which resembles the cold playing manner of the Yuan Kammu. He stated that three different sounds were obtained by beating in the centre, between the centre and the edge, and on the edge. He considered this to be the most ancient way to play the kettlegong. The beating on the edge of the surface may correspond to the "scraping", which among the Yuan Kammu is produced on the side of the kettlegong's body. This technique is also used by the Miao of Southeast Guizhou (Kweichow) and the Muong at Ngoc Lac.<sup>48</sup> "Scraping" with a hard drum-stick or with a whisk-like bundle of sticks, which is rather well documented in writing and in photographs, seems not to be practiced by the Yuan Kammu, who use only the fingernails to obtain this sound.<sup>49</sup>

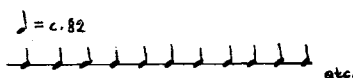
Though the Yuan Kammu employ the same playing manner for all happy occasions, people who hear a yàan from a distance can deduce for which reason it is being played. When a yàan is tested it is played only for a short while, and while buffalo ceremonies can occur at any time, house-building is only undertaken during the couple of months before the sowing season.

#### Uses and Playing Manner of Mòoŋ and Crééŋ

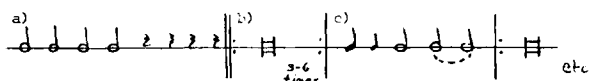
The small variety of bossed gong, mòoŋ, and the cymbals, crééŋ, are always played together. They have a ritual function at buffalo ceremonies and are normally played at feasts which accompany the ceremonies. Mòoŋ and crééŋ are also freely used on any festive occasion. Since most parties take place in one of the common-houses, this is where they are most commonly played. They are seldom played outdoors.

The mòoŋ and crééŋ are used for song-accompaniment in many situations, and as accompaniment to the sword dance. They are occa-



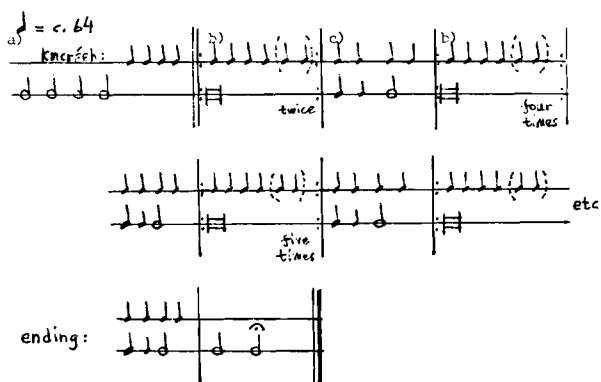


Ex. 1. Tám ràn. The hot playing manner. Kettlegong.

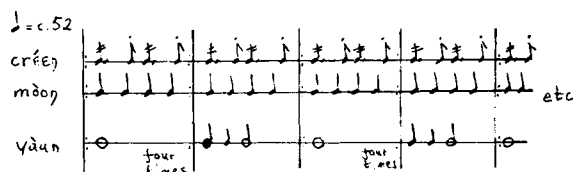


Ex. 2. Tám yàal. The cold playing manner. Kettlegong.

- a) Beginning formula. The four tones are beaten in a circle around the centre of the kettlegong's face.
- b) Beaten in the centre.
- c) Kmtλan pattern. The smaller note is unstressed.



Ex. 3. Tám yàal with kncésh. The embellishment is obtained by hitting the side of the kettlegong with the finger-nails of the left hand. The basic pattern is the same as in ex. 2.



Ex. 4. Tám yàal. Gong (mòη) and cymbals (créη) played together with the kettlegong (yàan). Only the kettlegong is played kmtλan (cf. Ex. 2c), but this playing technique is also used for gongs.

sionally also used to chase away tigers or other wild animals. On some occasions the mòη and créη are used in processions together with the long wooden drum.

The *mòŋ* is held in the left hand and beaten with a padded drumstick. A short string is stuck through two holes on its side, and a knot is made under each of these holes. The string is inspected before the *mòŋ* is used, for it wears out easily and a *mòŋ* breaks easily if it is dropped on the floor.

The *créŋ* are two-handed cymbals. They are clashed horizontally or with a slight vertical motion. A roll effect is obtained when the broad rims of the cymbals are permitted to vibrate against each other (ex. 4).

Gongs and cymbals of different sizes are used in gong-ensembles. Generally, the smallest gong-cymbals play fastest and the largest slowest. At feasts following ceremonies on which kettlegongs are used, gongs and cymbals may form an ensemble together with kettlegongs. In such cases the kettlegongs, which are the largest and which have more reverberation, play the slowest part (ex. 4).

### Conclusion

The kettlegong, *yàan*, is the most important of the gongs where value, power and function are concerned. The older the kettlegong is, the more important it is. Next in order comes the large bossed gong, *rpàaŋ*. The small bossed gong, *mòŋ*, which always is used together with the cymbals, *créŋ*, is of much less importance with regard to value and power, and it is not a ritual instrument. The economic value of bossed gongs depends on size and to some degree also on age.

Most gongs of great importance are too expensive to purchase, so the majority of these are inherited goods. All gongs are owned by the individual local lineage groups. Each member of the local lineage group has free access to any of its gongs. Kettlegongs (and *rpàaŋ*) are used at rather few ceremonial occasions, all of which concern individual families or lineage groups. A kettlegong may bring good fortune or misfortune, but only to members of the local lineage group which owns it.

In these respects the gongs—and the kettlegongs in particular—differ from the long wooden drums, which will be treated separately in another article in this Journal.

### NOTES

1. This study is a part of a project entitled "Kammu Language and Folklore Project" sponsored by the Swedish Bank Tercentenary Foundation and the Swedish Humanistic Research Council (see this journal Vol. 38 part 1, 1979, for further information). We thank Dr. Kristina Lindell for her help and support and Roger Greatrex, B. A., for correcting our English.

2. See Lindell *et al*, 1977: 9–11 for details about the Kammu people.

3. That Burma has been a centre for the fabrication of kettlegongs is evident from the literature on this subject. For a selected bibliography see Kunst 1949. The Lwà people mentioned here are probably identical with the La-Wa mentioned by de Beauclair 1970: 98, n.1, and Yupho 1960: 63.

4. We have not been able to identify this people.

5. Cf. Yupho 1960: 63.

6. Cf. Smalley 1965. In this article Smalley regards the word *c̄aŋ* as a personal name. It seems more likely, however, that it is a designation for a person with great magical power.

7. Marshall 1922: 117; Kenny 1927: 167.

8. The Kammu stories, which have been collected by the Kammu Language And Folklore Project, are under publication. Lindell *et al* 1977 has appeared so far and other volumes are forthcoming. The stories quoted here are all summarized and still unpublished.

9. For casting technique and the alloy see e.g. Mercier 1956.

10. The division in three age groups seems to be used also by the Sgaw Karen in Burma, Marshall 1922: 117–118. Marshall notes that “old” kettlegongs are not always very old.

11. The diameter is first measured by a stick or a string. Its length is then measured by counting the number of palm-breadths which can be fitted along the measurer. A palm-breadth in measuring a kettlegong, is the width of the fingers at the first knuckle and the width of thumb. However, when measuring smaller objects like gongs the width of thumb is not included, only the width of the fingers at the knuckles. The Kammu count every hand as it is taken away.

12. There is some uncertainty as to whether the Kammu know of *yàan* with frogs in six or eight places on the kettlegong's face.

13. Fig. 1 shows only two elephants. Possibly the number of elephants vary from 1 to 3 like the number of frogs.

14. The Sgaw Karen in Burma call these ‘snails’, cf. Marshall 1922. In Thailand they are also interpreted as ‘shellfish’, cf. Yupho 1960: 60.

15. A similar list of types is reported by Marshall, 1922: 118, for the Sgaw Karen. It is not always clear what it is that makes one type differ from another. Also antique earthen-ware jars may have names with the word *r̄aŋ* ‘flower’.

16. Cf. e.g. Kenny 1927 concerning the Karen.

17. Also coins belong to *r̄ooy yàk*. The figure on the French *piastre de commerce* is taken to represent *r̄ooy yàk* with “horns”, and the plant beside this figure is interpreted as rice-flowers.

18. It is not clear if the spirits are thought of in the singular or plural form. It seems that each spirit is conceived as an entity. As soon as a spirit manifests itself by entering an animal, a person or an object, it is apparently thought of as an individual part of the entity.

19. Cf. Hirth 1904 concerning older Chinese literary sources.

20. The *r̄ooy rw̄aay* is mentioned in connection with the Üu Kammu in Roux 1927. Here the symptoms appear to be different. See also Kauffmann 1977: 184 ff. concerning the Lwà and Kania 1969: 99 ff. concerning the So.

21. The kettlegong without figures on the side (and with only one frog) is used for funerals, by some of the Sgaw Karen, Cf. Marshall 1922: 118.

22. *Krw̄aŋ* is the Kammu word and *m̄eŋ w̄aŋ* the Lao word.

23. The Kammu calendar is described in Lindell, Svantesson and Tayanin (ms).

24. For rain-making see Lundström and Tayanin (ms).

25. It is interesting to note that the frog figures have been interpreted as likenesses of the kettlegong's spirit also elsewhere, according to a Chinese source, cf. Hirth 1904: 229.

26. This is called "mitteltief" or "mittelflach" by Simbriger 1939: 20. The profile of the gong used by the Kammu is similar to that called "Nr. 9" by Simbriger (Tafel I). See Simbriger 1939 for details about materials and the making of such gongs.

27. The name *mooŋ* seems to have followed the gongs from Burma to Thailand and Laos, cf. Simbriger 1939: 22.

28. Izikowitz 1951: 100, reports that kettlegongs were occasionally, but not often, used for bride-price by the Lamet.

29. Cf. Lindell, Swahn and Tayanin 1977: 100, n.10.

30. Kettlegongs are said to be stored under spirit trees by the Karen, cf. Kenny 1927: 166. The Lamet bury them in the ground, cf. Izikowitz 1951: 348.

31. See de Beauclair 1970: 97 for similar stories among the Miao.

32. See the photograph in Reinhard 1937: 97 or in Sachs 1917, Abb. 6.

33. These uses are frequently mentioned, cf. Hirth 1904, Hsu 1977.

34. This is however the case among the Kammu of the Khwēn and Róok areas. Evidently this is also the case in the Ūu area, cf. Roux 1927: 196-197. The same is true for the Lamet, cf. Izikowitz 1951: 243 and 247. The use of kettlegongs at totemic ceremonies among the Kammu in Vietnam, cf. Dang 1973: 128, is not known in the Yuan area.

35. In Roux 1927 there is a photograph (pl. XV) of a kettlegong being carried by Kammu people of the Ūu area. It is suspended so that its face is vertical. The Yuan Kammu prefer to carry it with its face horizontal.

36. This practice is also mentioned by Yupho 1960: 61, concerning Thailand. The Kammu do not, however, connect this with the small holes to be found on many kettlegongs.

37. Cf. Izikowitz 1951: 108 for this practice among the Lamet.

38. The custom of beating the kettlegong only while the body is still in the house is reported from the Miao of South-east China, cf. de Beauclair 1970: 44.

39. Cf. Roux 1927: 96 for a similar sacrifice to the kettlegong among the Ūu Kammu, and Izikowitz 1951: 116-18 for the Lamet, who also pray for more kettlegongs together with the sacrifices.

40. For head-washing among the Lawa, see Kauffmann 1977: 201, and among the So, see Kania 1969: 78-79.

41. The kettlegong was not used at the funeral described by Roux 1927 in the Ūu area. Maybe he witnessed the burial of a person who had died an unnatural death. In such cases the ceremony is much simpler. It is also possible, however, that the Ūu Kammu bury their dead without special ceremonies. This is the case among the Kammu in the Khwēn area.

42. The long wooden drum is beaten fast in the case of danger. Among the Palaungs in Burma drums and gongs are beaten fast to inform that a death has occurred, cf. Milne 1924: 291.

43. According to Marshall 1922: 118 and 194-195, Karen of the Pegu Hills differ between "hot" kettlegongs without figures on the side played at funerals, and "cool" kettlegongs used on festive occasions. Karen in Toungoo, however, do not make this distinction. The Yuan Kammu use these terms for playing techniques, not for the kettlegongs as such.

44. Also bamboo tubes, *tiiŋ*, and side-blown flute, *tóət*, belong to this ceremony. There is also a special song, *yàa*. Cf. Lundström and Tayanin 1978: 65.

45. Roux 1927: 195-96.
46. de Gironcourt 1942: 109 and 132.
47. de Beauclair 1970: 98, n.l, has interpreted the "Kha" mentioned in de Gironcourt's article as "Tsa Khmu", i.e. Kammu
48. de Beauclair 1970: 97 and Jansé quoted on p. 98, n.l.
49. For single bamboo stick cf. note 32 and for bundle of sticks cf. de Gironcourt 1942 Phot. 2. Similar drumsticks are used by the Yuan Kammu but only for the long wooden drum.

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