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Thai Melodic Percussion 3

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CHAPTER V



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Phleng Tao

Pa ma hay Tao



Originally, 'Phleng Pa ma hay' was a Song Chan (medium tempo) song widely used in courtship scenes of traditional plays. Later, in 1923, Master Montri Tramote expanded the composition into a Sam Chan (slow tempo) and condensed it into a Chan Diao (fast tempo). This completed the 'Thao' (suite) structure, conforming to the musical popularity of that era.

In terms of performance, musicians in the past typically played the main melody, known as 'Thang Phuen' (the basic melody), repeatedly for four rounds. To reduce this monotony, a technique of melodic variation called 'Thang Plian' (the altered melody) was later developed to be played interchangeably. This is especially evident in Master Montri's 3-chan version of Phleng Pa ma hay, which intricately alternates between 'Thang Phuen' and 'Thang Plian' while incorporating Burmese and Mon musical accents. Consequently, the melody across all four rounds is almost entirely unique. Meanwhile, the Song Chan and Chan Diao sections are clearly structured to play 'Thang Phuen' in the first round and 'Thang Plian' in the second (Tramote & Kultan, 1980).

Kaek ku lit Tao



“Phleng Khaek Ku lit Tao” was adapted from an older song named “Khaek Nang” in 1929 by Kru Montree. He renamed it using the Malay word “Kulit,” meaning “Nang” (leather) in Thai. This swift composition was sparked by a challenge from a Navy singer who asked Kru Montree to play a different suite. Not wanting to lose face, Kru Montree confidently agreed despite not knowing how to play it. To avoid embarrassment at their next performance, he rushed home and urgently composed his own suite, naming it “Khaek Kulit (Tramote & Kultan, 1980).

Ka men puang Tao

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"Phleng Khamen Phuang" is a traditional Thai composition originally created by ancient musicians as a Song Chun (medium tempo) song featuring a Khmer musical accent. During the reign of King Rama V, Prince Naris adapted this melody for a tableau vivant performance designed to welcome foreign dignitaries. Specifically, the melody was used in the "Khom Dam Din" episode for the character Phra Pathum, starting with the lyrics "Muea Nan Phra Pathum Suriyawong Song Khan". The song's popularity surged to the point where even non-musicians sang it frequently. Consequently, the general public, unaware of its original title, began calling it "Khamen Phra Pathum" after the lyrics, a name that almost permanently replaced the original.

Around 1907, the renowned master Luang Pradit Phairoh (Sorn Silapabanleng) expanded the original Song Chun melody into a Sam Chun (slow tempo) version. He masterfully utilized the "Thang Kro" (tremolo) technique while maintaining the Khmer accent, similar to his work on "Khamen Liap Nakhon," but officially retained the name "Khamen Phuang". This Sam Chun version achieved massive success, becoming arguably his most popular composition and even inspiring numerous modern musical adaptations. Later, as the "Thao" (suite) structure gained widespread popularity, Muen Prakhomphlengprasan (Jai Nittayaphalin) completed the suite by condensing the original Song Chun melody into a Chan Diao (fast tempo) version. This collaborative evolution resulted in the complete "Khamen Phuang Thao" suite that continues to be performed today (Tramote & Kultan, 1980).

Mon ram dap Tao

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"Phleng Mon Ram Dap" is an ancient traditional Thai composition originally played in a Song Chun (medium tempo) rhythm, featuring a distinct Mon musical accent. It has been widely used to accompany traditional performances such as Khon and Lakhon since ancient times. Kru Montree formulated an intriguing hypothesis regarding its true origin. He suspected that the song was originally named "Phleng Uparat Khat Kho Chang" (The Crown Prince's Neck Broken on the Elephant), which was part of an ancient Mahori musical suite depicting King Naresuan's legendary elephant battle. Historically, the Burmese King who fought King Naresuan ruled from Hongsawadi (Pegu), an ancient Mon city. Prominent Thai literature, such as pieces by Sunthorn Phu and Prince Paramanuchit Chinorot, often associated the Burmese forces with the Mon region. Kru Montree believed this literary association might have caused the public to misunderstand the Crown Prince as a Mon figure, eventually leading to the song being renamed "Phleng Mon Ram Dap". Musically, this theory is supported by the fact that the melody is almost identical to another song in the suite, differing by only a few notes.

In 1932, Kru Montree took this ancient Song Chun piece and developed it into a complete "Thao" (suite) structure. He composed a new Sam Chun (slow tempo) version that heavily emphasized the Mon musical accent. Additionally, he composed a completely new instrumental melody for the Song Chun section to sound more authentically Mon, and then condensed it into a fast-paced Chan Diao version. Ultimately, for "Phleng Mon Ram Dap Thao," Kru Montree masterfully composed almost the entire suite—both the vocal and instrumental melodies—from scratch, retaining only the vocal melody of the original Song Chun piece.



The song structure is as follows:



Song	Melodic style:
Pa ma hay Tao	This song has a partly prescribed melody.
Kaek ku lit Tao	This song has a partly prescribed melody.
Ka men puang Tao	This song has a partly prescribed melody.
Mon ram dap Tao	This song has a partly prescribed melody.

Reference list

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Tramote, M., & Kultan, W. (1980). *Fang lae khao chai phleng Thai* [*Listening and understanding Thai music*]. Bangkok: Thai Kasem



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