

## **Dynamics Of The Myanmar Drum Ensemble**

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### **Abstract**

In every society, concerning the history of arts, musical instruments are almost universal components of human culture. The Myanmar Drum Ensemble (*saing wain* in Myanmar language) is one of Myanmar's traditional musical instruments. In Myanmar society, the drum ensemble is used as part of the annual-cycle rituals, life-cycle rituals and crisis rituals. This research describes the dynamics of the Myanmar Drum Ensemble, *saing wain*. Field ethnography, focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), in-depth interviews (IDI), informal conversations (IC) and direct observation (DO) were used for data collection. Study sites are *Bo Tun Zan* ward in *Daw Pon* Township, No.2 ward in North *Okkalapa* Township, No.5 ward in *Mayangone* Township, *Ye Mon* village, *Kyungalay* village, *Kyauk Ain* village in *Hlegu* Township. The Myanmar drum ensemble emerged from a merger of the Royal Music and the Folk Music from the *Kone-baung* period (AD 1752-1856). It has three special characteristics: its Melodic Character, its Harmonic Character and its Rhythmic Character. Furthermore, the members of the drum ensembles are known to have had close relationships with the public throughout the colonial and the post-independence periods. Today drum ensembles have closer contact with people from the rural areas, whereas city dwellers rely more on modern musical instruments for entertainment.

Key words: Drum Ensemble, *Saing Wain*, novitiation, musical instruments

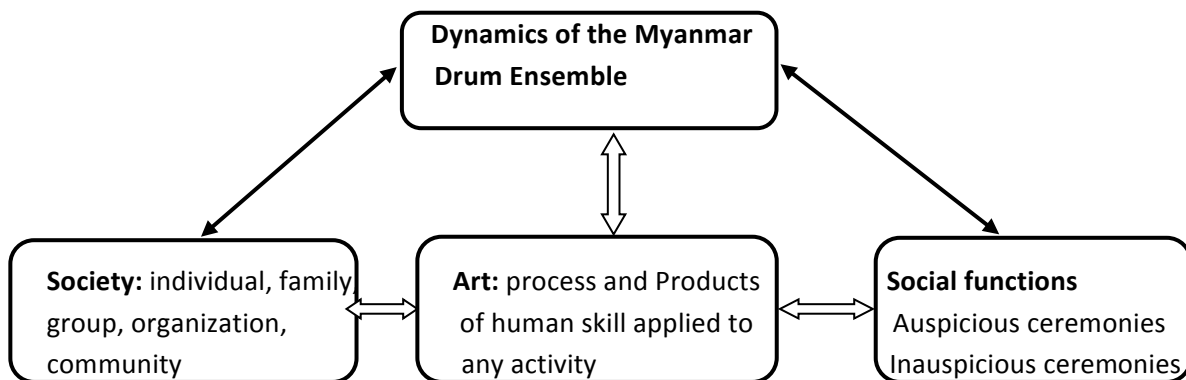
### **Introduction**

Art and musical instruments are universal components of human culture in every society. Humankind has throughout the ages created music and musical instruments using material sources, available in their environment to express their feelings and to create fine arts in music based upon their feelings from their hearts. Art has an effect on the individual and on a particular culture in a society. Socially, art plays a number of different roles by virtue of its capacity to embody symbolic significance for its audience. Art fulfills a number of important social functions (Crapo. H, 2002). Since earliest times, musical instruments have been used for a variety of purposes, ranging from the entertainment of concert audiences to the accompaniment of dances, rituals, work, and medicine. The use of instruments for religious ceremonies has continued down to the present day, though at various times they have been suspect because of their secular associations. The Myanmar Drum Ensemble (*saing wain* in Myanmar language) is one of Myanmar's traditional musical instruments. The drum ensemble is used as part of the annual-cycle rituals, life-cycle rituals and crisis rituals. Apart from these events, drum ensembles are used for religious affairs and entertainment, which differ according to their different functions.

The aim of this paper is to explore the dynamics of the Myanmar Drum Ensemble (*saing wain* in Myanmar language). The objective of this research is to describe the origin of Myanmar Musical Instruments, and its relation to the traditional functions and Myanmar drum ensemble in the socio-cultural life of Myanmar society. It is also intended to explore the creative process and the interaction of artists and their audience, and the relationships with other aspects of culture and society.

Field ethnography, focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), in-depth interviews (IDI), informal conversations (IC) and direct observation (DO) were used for data collection. Study sites are *Bo Tun Zan* ward in *Daw Pon* Township, No (2) ward in North *Okkalapa* Township, No (5) ward in *Mayangone* Township, *Ye Mon* village, *Kyungalay* village, *Kyauk Ain* village in *Hlegu* Township.

### Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

In the conceptual framework, in every society, concerning the history of arts, a musical instrument is almost always a universal component of human culture. Art is both the process and the product of human skill applied to creative activity in such societies. Members of society apply imagination and skill to matter, movement and sound to express emotions and values and to give one another pleasure. All cultures have their own traditional way of using the voice and instruments in structured ways to produce sound and music. Therefore music and musical instruments vary from one region to another as well as it is different from social functions such as auspicious ceremonies and inauspicious ceremonies. Culture is always changing. It includes art, religion and custom. In Myanmar society art plays an important role in social activities. The dynamic structure of the drum

ensemble has changed over time. Moreover it has become an insight into the inner dynamic of a historical period or social movement or work of art.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Documentary research:**

Documents about the history of Myanmar music and activities of other concern were collected from text books, previous research, journals and online sources for the research.

### **Primary data collection:**

Field ethnography, focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), in-depth interviews (IDI), informal conversations (IC) and direct observation (DO) were used for data collection.

**Study design:** It was a cross-sectional descriptive design using a qualitative methodology.

**Study Population:** The three groups of the community were divided; (1) The drum ensemble members of musicians whose livelihoods depend solely upon *Myanmar* drum ensemble, (2) Donors (parents conducted novitiation ceremonies for their children) and (3) The audiences at a drum-ensemble performance could include people of various types and age groups.

**Study area:** The villages and wards in Yangon region were chosen namely No (5) ward in “Mayangone” Township, “Ye Mon” village, “Kyungalay” village, “Kyauk Ain” village in “Hlegu” Township.

## **Data collection methods**

**Key-informant interviews (KIIs)** were conducted with fifteen interviewees. In terms of occupations and social status, these fifteen key informants were selected in a wide range from townfolk to amateur musician to the Head monks of the monastery.

**In depth interviews (IDIs)** were conducted with Donors conducted novitiation ceremonies for their children

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** were conducted local people (audiences) and professional musicians from drum ensembles.

In this paper firstly, the origin of Myanmar musical instruments is traced from the historical records, and secondly, the relationship between musical instruments and social activities, especially the novitiation ceremony of Myanmar is described. Then the interactions of artists and their audience are pointed out. In the discussion, it defines the components to produce a multi sound. Finally, the criteria of music in different periods and the value on musical instruments are then discussed in the conclusion.

## Historical Background of *Myanmar* Traditional Musical Instruments

Myanmar's history of music can be divided into six periods for study *Thaton* and *Srikistra* (5<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup>), *Bagan* (9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>), *Inwa* (AD 1364-1752), *Konebaung* (AD 1752-1856) and the later period. Moreover, people have used music to celebrate different rituals and occasions relevant to their land and personal life events.

Singing and dancing a festival is evidenced on clay tablets of 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century found in the environs of *Thaton* and *Bago*. During this period a *Pyu* cultural delegation visited to China and they had brass musical instruments, conches, string instruments, and other instruments made of bamboo, leather, ivory, gourd and horn. (see detail AD 802, the *Myanmar Archaeological Digest* volume-3) and from the five brass figurines (see figure 2) excavated in 1966-67 at the site of the ancient *Srikistra*. Chinese records show that *Pyu* music was quite developed at that time.

The period from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries belongs to *Bagan*, which was a result of the cultural development from the *Mon* culture of *Thaton*, and the *Pyu* culture of *Srikistra*. The cultural mix of the *Mon* and *Pyu* musical instruments, music and dance mix Myanmar customs and habits, gave birth to the *Bagan* period of musical culture emergence. (Nyunt Tin, 1968) In the *Bagan* period, the wealthy rulers and citizens built pagodas, made donations and carried out meritorious deeds, and celebrated them with pomp and ceremony where musical instruments took on significant roles. In this *Bagan* era, the rhythmic bands commenced.

In the beginning, the rhythmic bands consisted of drums, horn, cymbals, and other rhythmic instruments (see detail *Myanmar Tharyayturiya*). Moreover, harp music became popular in this *Bagan* era (see detail in one of statues playing the harp on the Cave of Arnandar Pagoda). It was found out that it originated and the evolution took place during King *Ah-Laung-Si-Thu* era. During His Majesty's tour around his kingdom on a waterway King *Ah-Laung-Si-Thu* happened to come across a *Za-bu-Tha-Pye* Tree, and he heard and noticed unique combination: sound of blowing wind across the leaves embracing each other by blowing wind, the sound of *Eugenia* ("*tha-pye*" in Myanmar) fruits dropping and splashing into water, and a sound of the fallen fruits surface again from the water. Those events happened simultaneously and were said to make a most pleasant sound to His Majesty ears. By the King's orders, the musicians observed and tried to create relative instruments based upon those unique sounds. (Zeya Thin Khayar, 1960) (see detail *Shwebon Nidan*)



Figure. 2 The flautist, cymbal player, drums player, and dancer and comical person  
(Source from *Myanmar Archaeological Digest* volume-3)

In the *Inwa* era (AD 1364-1752), Royal drums (“*sidaw*” in Myanmar) were played extensively as part of palace rituals and during royal ceremonies and occasions. They were played during the entrance and exit of the king and queen into the Audience Hall, and when monarchs were attending grand dramas or marionette shows. The *sidaw* was also played a ploughing ceremonies, city visits, and ceremonies marking the beginning and ending of the sitting of the Hluttaw. Gift presentation ceremonies were also marked by use of the *sidaw* as was the beginning of the *Thingyan Water Festival*. It was played when soldiers marched to war during the *Inwa*, *Taungo*, and *Nyaungyan* dynasties. The introduction of *Pathsaing*<sup>1</sup>, which is a prelude to the *Myanmar* Drum Ensemble, also began in this period (Kalar, 1961). In those days there were two types of drum ensembles, such as the *Myanmar* ensemble and the *Mon* ensemble in the Royal family.

In *Kounebaung* era (AD 1752-1856), in rural donation festivals, played not on a stage but on the ground it is known as *mjei wain:zat* (see figure-9) used in “*boun*”<sup>2</sup>, “*ou: zi*”<sup>3</sup>, and “*bjo:*”<sup>4</sup>. Horn, cymbals, bamboo clapper and *boun shei gji*:<sup>5</sup> carried with a rope round the neck were played when entertaining *dou ba*:<sup>6</sup> (Nu, 1967). The *Shwebo* region, Big Drums were used for dance performances at *Leh Pon Cha Pwe*<sup>7</sup>, conducted to worship nats at harvest time. Hence emerged *Bongyi Than*<sup>8</sup>, played not only at the agricultural festivals, but also at Charity Ceremony and other auspicious occasions like weddings. At first these dances were mostly used by the farmers but later were found to have advanced to the court level (see detail *Myanmar Yoeyar Yin Kyae Hmu Saing Turiyar Myar*) (Tin Tun Oo, 2007).



Figure 3 Drum ensemble from *Mjei-wain-zat*

<sup>1</sup> A drum-circle ensemble

<sup>2</sup> Double-headed drum

<sup>3</sup> Open-ended drum with a long body

<sup>4</sup> Double-sided big drum

<sup>5</sup> Big long drum

<sup>6</sup> Short drum

<sup>7</sup> Agricultural festival

<sup>8</sup> Big Drum Music

(Source from *Myanma Thabin Lawka*, Nu, 1967)

Drum ensembles were first invented and played during King Tharyawady's reign (1837-1864). Instruments used in this era were the big drum, long drum, the short drum, the cymbal, chimes, bamboo clappers, horn, and flute. The counterpart instruments that thrive in the court with which the courtiers were entertained was the Court or Royal Music. Instruments which produced this music had to be chosen so as to produce smooth and pleasant sounds. The systematic composition of the *Konebaung* era was derived from this unique Royal Music. Instruments chosen for this type of music were the harp, bamboo xylophone, flute, chimes, and rhythmic clappers. Common people and farm workers mostly used mostly used leather instruments to produce Folk Music which was different from the soft and melodic Royal Music played at in court with harps and xylophone. Contrary to this was the Folk Music which had its origin from the Bagan culture and the songs were played and sung with rhythmic beats. Both kinds of music enhanced greatly in the Kongbaung Era. The folk music became accepted in court and later the two kinds of music merged systematically to become the *Myanmar* drum ensemble.

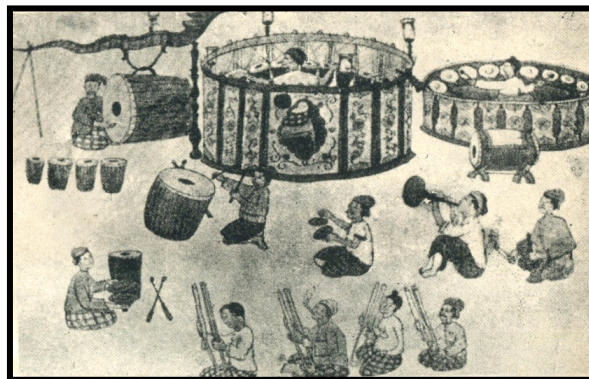


Figure 4 Drum ensemble of *Kongbaung* era  
(Source from *Myanma Thabin Lawka*, Nu, 1967)

King *Tharyawady* was known to enjoy the *Myanmar* orchestra and *Myawady Mingyi Sa* and Prince *Pyin-si* managed to modify the melody, chords and ways of playing instruments in Thai way to *Myanmar* tuning, made to be relatively pleasant to *Myanmar* ears (see detail *Myanma Thabin Lawka*) (Nu, 1967). It was considered to be a mixed cultural development in *Myanmar* musical stature. *Myanmar* Drum Ensemble was developed, promoted and awarded king *Tharyawady*. The folk music became accepted in court and later the two kinds of music merged systematically to become the *Myanmar* drum ensemble.

Later, in the *Yadanabon* era (1857-1885), the drum ensemble stage was described as gilded and decorated with glass mosaic in the times of King *Mindon*. It was also stated that the *Pat-ma-chaun*

ensemble<sup>9</sup> was added to the drum ensemble (see detail *Myanmar Saing Waing Gyi Turiyar Tee Chet Myar*) (Aung Kyair, 2004). Drum Ensembles were asked to perform at the ear piercing ceremonies and the naming ceremonies of the princes and princesses. The musicians who performed at these ceremonies conferred titles such as *Nay Myo Kyaw Zwar Khaung*, *Nay Myo Bala Kyaw Thu*, *Dei Weindra* and they conferred *Yar Zar* which is prize to skillful musicians the village. Thus the status of music and musicians came to its zenith at that time. Examples of this would be the famous musicians *Day-wa-indra Maung Maung Gyi*, *Ywa Zar Gyi Saya Pe*, *Nay Myo Bala Kyaw Thu - Saing Saya Sein Baydar* (see detail *Music and Dance*) (Aye Kyi, 1986).

In the Colonial period (1885-1948), musical instruments infiltrated into the Myanmar musical instrumentss and the royal drum ensemble seemed to have been enriched with decorations and mosaics. In 1904, the famed gongs was introduced and it was used in drum ensemble. At that time *Sein Baydar* decorated his ensemble stand with sculpted images that were different to typical types of dragonall done in mosaic, and included a jazz band in his ensemble. Spotlights were created and musicians began to wear uniforms. Drum masters and musicians of the period bridged a gap between the *Konebaung* music and that of today by giving way to foreign influences. However, the tradition *Bamar* drum ensemble maintained its status and continued to survive with its own innovations.

Foreign musical instruments gradually began to have great influence on Myanmar music in the years 1915 and 1916. In the modern day drum ensembles, instruments such as the organ, piano and local instuments used by ensembles with a large number of musicians. In drum ensemble performances, the drum master is supported with two or three comedians who sit or stand at the back of *saing sayar*<sup>10</sup> to make the performances lively and pleasant. When most of music bands came from Yangon and Mandalay, whose music was frequently broadcasted by the Myanmar Broadcasting Station were most popular. The *Myoma* Band it is most of music band from Mandalay has been well liked since the pre-independent days to date. In the songs and dances of the Myanmar Water festival are used in *chauk-lone-pat*<sup>11</sup> it is an important insturment in Myanmar music. Today, even when the *Myanmar* drum ensemble is not performed live in many of the social events and ceremonies in *Bamar* society, recording drum music such as tapes, CDs<sup>12</sup>, VCDs<sup>13</sup> are used commonly. However, the *Myanmar* Society's events use drum ensemble in different ways, it is found that today drum ensemble is a Myanmar cultural heritage. On religious occasions, the drum ensemble is used for pagoda festivals, novitiation ceremonies, inauguration ceremonies of monks and monasteries, honouring of monks, monk funerals, meal offering ceremonies and spirit ceremonies. Regarding commercial activities the drum ensemble is used at theatres, hotels and restaurants. It is also used as background music in films. For national occasions, the drum ensemble is used at State dinners, cultural exchange programmes, entertainment for diplomats, opening ceremonies of roads and bridges, and national sport programmes such as boxing, martial arts, and cane ball competitions.

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<sup>9</sup> A set of big drum (*Pat-ma*), short durm(*Sakhun*), Six-short-drum ensembles (*Chauklon-pat*)

<sup>10</sup> Leader of drum ensemble

<sup>11</sup> Six-short-drum ensemble

<sup>12</sup> The abbreviation for compact disc

<sup>13</sup> A disk on which large amounts of information, especially photographs and video, can be stored for use on computer or DVD player



Figure-5 Six-short-drum ensembles  
(Source from *Yin Kyay Hmu Magazine*; *Myanmar Saing Waing Turiya Tee-chet-myar*)

Although *Myanmar* music has advanced through the ages with a variety of instruments, most of the musical instruments are based on the leather instruments of the *Myanmar* drum ensemble. Drum ensemble used in a kind of events throughout the age such as religious, royal, agricultural and social events. It was also assumed that the Bamar drum ensemble became improved in material as well as in the skill of the players. In the reign of Myanmar Kings drum ensembles were typically used for rank or class to classify among royal and ordinary people, but today everyday people can use it.

### Development of the Music Tune in Drum Ensemble

Songs of the *Thawta linkara*<sup>14</sup> type had to be sung systematically with the lyrics and melody in a perfect rhythm. This is not so for the songs in *Wasanar Linkara*<sup>15</sup> where the songs are not sung to any particular rhythm. However, songs for rice-planting, for worshipping spirits for a better yield of harvest or fruits, and those for charity ceremonies emerged from the *Thawta Linkara* verses. These songs were usually performed in the crowd and thrived with the appreciation of the common people. The instruments used in attracting the crowd had to be sharp sounding where thick leather of bullock was stretched tightly over a hollow block of wood. The surface was then beaten or struck by hand or stick.

Myanmar music has all the melodic characters, harmonic character and the rhythmic character and is regarded as perfect. Furthermore, there are five types of instruments used in the *Myanmar* drum ensemble, namely the brass, string, leather, wind and percussion. The brass instruments produce medium sounds, the leather instruments produce clear precise sounds, the wind instruments produce long sounds. The instruments played with hands portray the melodic and harmonic characters by using brass instruments such as gongs and oboe and the base drum ensemble portray the rhythmic character by using leather instruments. In the *Myanmar* drum ensemble, the person who plays the drums has to bring out the melodic character and the rhythmic character and becomes the Commander or Leader who makes the two groups work together in harmony.

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<sup>14</sup> A type of Folk music

<sup>15</sup> A type of Royal music



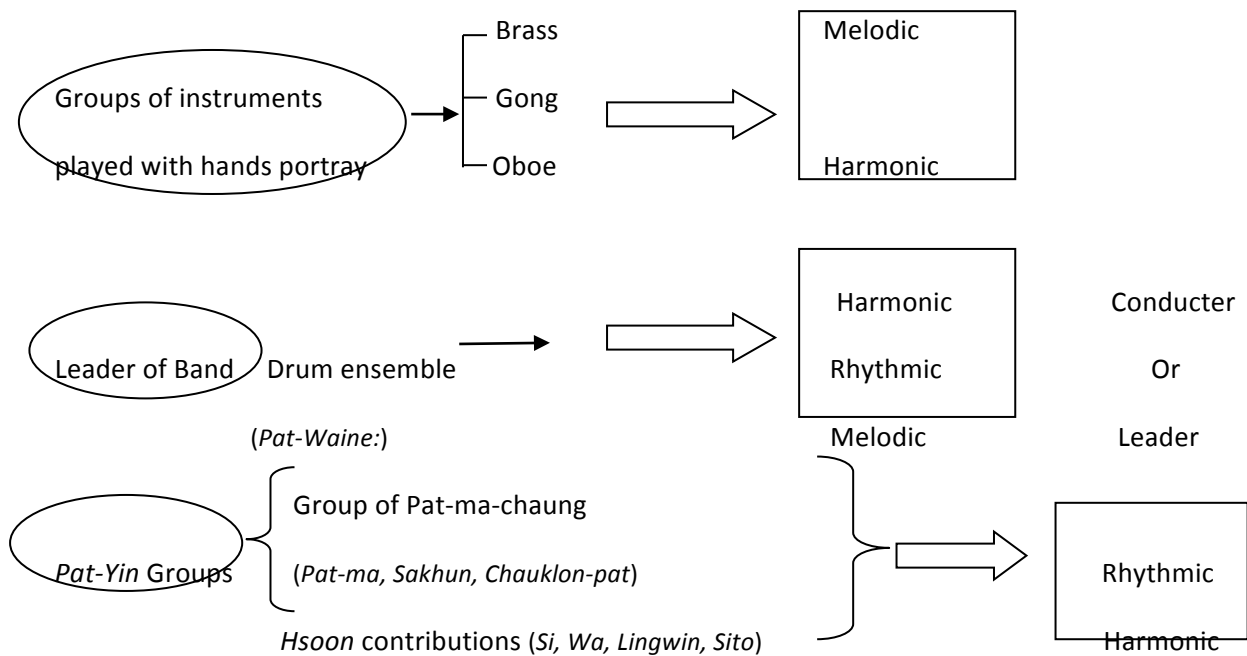
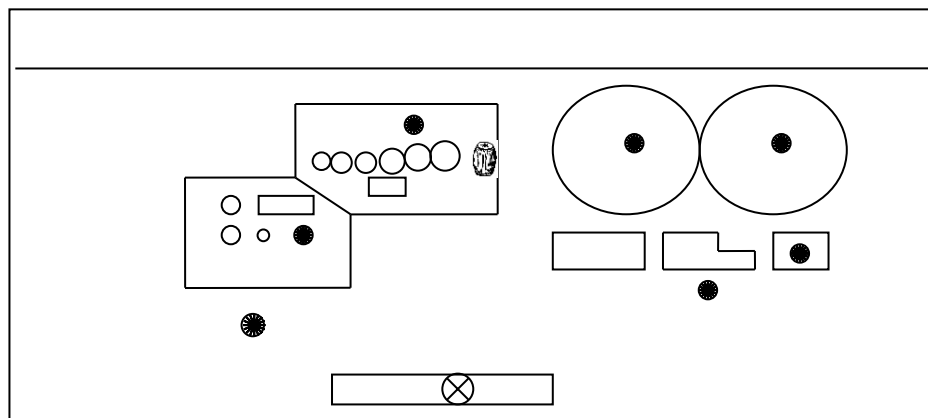


Figure (6) Three special characteristics of Myanmar Drum Ensemble



- 1 - Pat-waine:<sup>16</sup> 2 - Kyay-waine:<sup>17</sup> 3 - Hne:<sup>18</sup> 4 - Maun-saing<sup>19</sup> 5 - Saing-nauk-hta<sup>20</sup>  
 6 - Pat-ma-chaung<sup>21</sup> 7 - Hsoon<sup>22</sup> contributions 8 - Hanging gong 9 - Audiences

Figure (7) The musicians and instruments are placed systematically to have contact with each other in Myanmar drum ensemble instruments

## Modern Drum Ensemble

<sup>16</sup>A set of small drums hung in the order of their size

<sup>17</sup>Brass gong circle

<sup>18</sup>Oboe

<sup>19</sup>Framed gongs

<sup>20</sup>Vocalist-cum-comedian of a Myanmar orchestra

<sup>21</sup>Group of big drum, short drum, Six-short-drum ensembles

<sup>22</sup>Group of Si, Wa, Lingwin, Sito

A modern drum ensemble is comprised of a set of small drums hung in the order of their size (*Pat waine*), brass gong circle (*Kyay-waine*), Framed gongs (*Maun-saing*) the big drum (*pat-ma*), short drum (*si to*), six short-drum-ensemble (*Chauklon-pat*), oboe(*Hne*), timing bell (*Si, Wa*), cymbals(*Lingwin*), and clappers (*Hsoon* contributions) and Hanging gong.



Figure-8 Modern Drum ensemble  
(source from Yin Kyay Hmu Magazine; Myanmar Saing Waing Turiya Tee-chet-myar)

In Myanmar Society, drum ensemble is classified into two categories: *mingalar saing*<sup>23</sup> and *ah mingalar saing*<sup>24</sup>. The auspicious ceremonies such as part of the dance theater, donation ceremonies, state receptions, wedding ceremonies, novitiation ceremony, closing ceremony of seasonal alms food offering, etc. used in *mingalar saing* and inauspicious ceremonies such as a kind of funeral rites used in *ah mingalar saing*. However some people used to include drum ensemble entertainment among other programs in relative processes. Therefore, the study was conducted with most of leaders of drum ensemble; they said:

*“Most of people who live in Lower Myanmar do not classify to use their ceremony. The people hire for ceremony any ensemble. But Upper Myanmar have always been very superstitious. If they hold auspicious ceremony, they do not hire drum ensemble which is used in inauspicious ceremony. So, Saing Sayars usually avoid to play in these ceremonies.”*

According to the study, in Upper Myanmar, the drum ensemble is classified into three categories: the *mingalar saing* for auspicious ceremonies, *ah mingalar saing* for funerals and *balinasa saing*<sup>25</sup> for spiritual ceremonies. However this paper will describe only the relationship between novitiation ceremony and the drum ensemble.

### **The Drum Ensemble in Novitiation Ceremony (*shinpyue pwe* in Myanmar)**

<sup>23</sup> Drum ensemble play for auspicious ceremonies

<sup>24</sup> Drum ensemble play for inauspicious ceremonies

<sup>25</sup> A troupe which plays at offerings of food to spirits

According to observations, almost of *Myanmar* Buddhist parents regard the novitiation of their sons into monkhood as the most important religious duty in life. They highly value the status of religion's rightful heir. Therefore, parents save money in anticipation of the novitiation ceremony for their children.

The procedure for the ceremony may be different from one to the next. To find out more about the various procedures, surveys and interviews were conducted in "*Hlegu*" Township, *Kyungalay* village, "*Ye Mon*" village, "*Kyauk Ain*" village of "*Tharyargon*" village tract, and the Relic Tooth pagoda compound in *Mayangon* Township in Yangon Region. Interviewees comprised of monks, musicians, donors, and villagers.

*Kyauk Ain* village of the *Tharyargone* village tract will be used as an example for having the drum ensemble at a novitiation ceremonies. All novitiation ceremonies have had the tradition of including the drum ensemble handed down from a stream of ancestors. When there is to be a novitiation, the host has to hold talks and discussions for two or three months in advance with parents, relatives, village patrons, and those with previous novitiation experience. Then they have to hire the drum ensemble group. Only when they have the date fixed with the drum ensemble, then they could start preparations. It is customary for the villagers to hire the drum ensemble without fail for such occasions, because they believe that the auspicious deed is not complete without the drum ensemble. Therefore, they would have any kind of drum ensemble regardless of the size. About that the villagers was said:

*"If we held in shinpyue pwe, it is very important a customary for our village to hire saing waine:. Any person is very shy to make the ceremony without saing waine: and to accept as a ahlue-pein. So, If a family is unable to make the ceremony, we have to get the help of our relatives and the village' friends who is able to give a ahlu gyi. Holding every ahlue pwe is different because of depending on our property". Some of wealthy people can hire popular saing waine: and the person who has less property cannot be for it, but they used it at ahlue pwe: in the local famous saing waine".*

The study found that the objectives for having drums is for the village to enjoy the sound of drums, to make the occasion lively, to have a nice crowd, to entertain all guests regardless of their age, and for other people to have ceremonies likewise. According to the village traditions, the ceremony would be a *ahlue -pein*<sup>26</sup> without the drum ensemble no matter how well and how amply they feed their guests. A *ahlue-pein* means a skinny ceremony which is one where there are few guests and helpers. Another notable factor regarding these ceremonies (traditionally known as *Ahlu*) is the financial status of the hosts and their status in society.

There are three categories of the drum ensemble in their region: The City drum ensemble, The Regional drum ensemble, and the Local drum ensemble. The City drum ensemble is one that is

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<sup>26</sup> Skinny ceremony

popular in all parts of the country. The Regional drum ensemble is famous only in their region, and the Local drum ensemble is formed of local amateurs, playing their own drums, horns, cymbals, or clappers. The wealthy villagers normally send someone to town to hire a good drum ensemble. Those with a strong group of relatives or background also get a City or Regional drum ensemble, by helping and pooling their resources. Sometimes, villagers would have the host to get a Regional drum ensemble. In the *Kyauk Ain* village of the research area, the host, relatives, friends, and villagers all help out to get the City drum ensemble. Local groups hardly perform.

In the *Kyauk Ain* village, about the preparation of *ahlue pwe*, most of villagers noted:

*“When the village holds an ahlue pwe, every person knows to go and prepare for it as age and sex, and they have value like their duty. If a person doesn't have it, other doesn't have his or her affairs, but the village communities take him the form of ostracism and public ridicule. This manner dare not so behave villagers. Most people have to help understand their sense from on the eve of the ahlu to the end of ahlue”.*

Which this research is focused upon, villagers help out with the preparation such as cash, labour, food preparation, pandal construction and gathering firewood with the horse or bullock carts for about a month in advance. By doing this, they get the same type of help when their time comes. Parents have to send their sons to the monastery to learn from the Reverend Monk how to recite “*Tharanagon*” and to know 109 steps for “*Prestige Building*”. In addition to this it is customary in the village for anyone to make cash donations. About a week before the ceremony, male adults and youths have to start building a pandal in front of the hosts’ house to accommodate the visitors and the drum ensemble. Female adults and youths have to take care of the invitations and prepare for the parade.

In olden days, invitations are sent together with complementary cheroots. In the study area, there still exists the system of heralding. The heraldry (“*bjou: hi*” in Myanmar) would be a male adult who voluntarily informs other villagers of the social functions. Example of the herald would be:

*“Hear! Hear! In honour of the parents U Hla and Daw Tint of Kyauk Ain village Maung Tin and Ma Kyaing will be novitiating their beloved son Maung Toe into novicehood. All those who hear are invited to the novitiation pandal in Kyauk Ain on the first of Tagoo at noon”.*

Therefore, the village still has the system of heralding to come and eat at a feast their villager people and around other villages.

The drum ensemble in novitiation has to commence playing the opening drums as the ceremony begins. Local groups play only when the would-be novices parade through the streets. At other times, recorded drum music is played through loud speakers. At such ceremonies, drum ensemble

music broadcast from the Myanmar Broadcasting Station is played starting from the eve of the ceremony ("*ahlu*" in Myanmar) to let the whole village know of the novitiation. The recorded music is played again on the actual day of the ceremony. When the drum ensemble is not included, recorded plays and dramas are played through the speakers so loud that it would be heard from afar. Even today, recorded music of the big drum ensemble, together with harp music is played by using VCD, video, and DVD.

On commencement day of the novitiation the would-be novices are paraded through the streets of the village with a long procession trailing behind. A woman of a suitable age has to carry an offertory bowl of bananas, coconuts on her head and lead the procession. Behind her would be the novice, the parents, maidens carrying offertory bowls and finally, the musicians. Vocalists have to sing lively songs relating to the *Ahlu* and also have to dance to the lively music. The hosts, when they get back to the pandal, normally reward the musicians and dance troupes with pocket money.

On the eve of the *Ahlu*, the host gives a feast for guests and entertains them with the drum ensemble music. On the day of the *Ahlu*, the monks are offered meals and so are the guests. The drum ensemble entertains guests with drum music. In the afternoon when all have listened to the sermon, the hosts throw coins into the crowd and the drums are sounded to mark the completion of the auspicious deed.

From interviews at Ye Mon village, it is understood that there is a difference between Ostentation ("*Pakarthana*" in Myanmar) and Significance ("*Padarna*" in Myanmar) donation ceremonies. According to the regulations of the village, Significance ("*Padarna*" in Myanmar) donation ceremonies are conducted for religious purposes only and they are mostly conducted at the monastery. Sometimes, the *Ahlu* is held at their house. Guests are given meals and then the sermons are given with holy water dropping before the children get novitiated. Speakers or amplifiers are used for the playing of recorded drum music as a prelude to the ceremony on its eve. Songs and plays are also used to entertain the people. On the actual ceremony event, the big drum is played to announce the completion of the meritorious deed. However, in these regions where the *Ahlu* is given, either for Ostentation or Significance donation ceremonies, use of the drum ensemble is getting less frequent. From the observation on the use of drum ensemble music on VCDs, CDs, and audio tapes, the significance of the drum ensemble can be derived.

Some hosts, according to their financial status, hold grand *Ahlu* shiring drum ensembles or *Anjein pwe*<sup>27</sup>. There are three parts: the leading lady dancer, the comedians and the musicians". Thus the inclusion of the drum ensemble in the theatre is apparent.

One outstanding feature of the village of this study is that there is an association for helping villagers in their social matters. When a household wants to become a member, it has to contribute some cash, and the consolidated fund is used to buy necessary materials for all to utilize free of charge on special occasions. Members help out each other with the building of pandals, cooking and ushering when needed. Furthermore, villagers all pool in cash to conduct group novitiation ceremonies at the

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<sup>27</sup> Dance troupes

monastery for those who cannot afford to novitiate their children. They could contribute as much as they can though. Sometimes, according to the amount of donations, a drum ensemble is hired.

When some of people who lived in Yangon especially around downtown, group novitiations, studied about novitiation ceremonies, they said that:

*“Yangon is unlike the countryside because countrymen have more spare time and extensive plots. Most people have a long vacation in the summer, and there are many shinpyue ahlue pwe during the months of March and April. Therefore, during this time we often see the car which carries the novice go by, followed by cars with a music troupe”.*

Group novitiations are normally conducted either at times when people are not too busy or during long holidays in March or April. Music band troupes are hired to join the novices' parade. The car which carries the novices goes first, followed by cars for offertory bowl bearing ladies. At last in the procession would be the music bands. The procession goes round the pagoda in three complete circles. The bands include the mini dru ensemble (six drums, a short drum, cymbals, and oboe) in addition to western musical instruments such as side drums, saxophone, and keyboard or organ. Vocalists sing songs related to the novitiation, Water Festival (*“Thin: gjan pwe:”* in Myanmar), all the way and back. The sound of the music and drums has become the icon of novitiation in Yangon. Therefore, the interrelation between the drum ensemble and the Myanmar traditional songs can be clearly observed here. In the greater Yangon area, during the months of March and April, novitiations are conducted almost every day, usually at monasteries. Most often, those who can afford would sponsor for novitiation of both male and female novices and the Myanmar Television and Myanmar Radio and Television Chanel- 4 aid the complete pomp and ceremony of these events. Some major contributors collaboratively and individually novitiate 100 male and 100 female novices and see to the meals, dressing and the rest of the paraphernalia. In such ceremonies, the drum ensembles are hired. From above observations, it is apparent that the drum ensembles still influence the *MyanmarAhlusin* in their unique way.

### **Performances in playing drum ensemble**

As mentioned earlier, the drum circle ensemble is not conducted solo, but by a group of performers. In a Myanmar drum ensemble there are, besides performers, vocalists and (*“saingnau' hta”*(or)*“saingnau' htain”* in Myanmar) which means: a person who plays timing bells and clapper and sings. In other words, he is called a comedian for his role to entertain the audience with jokes. Therefore *Saing nau' hta* is important role in drum ensemble. In relation to the role of *saing nau' hta*, participants interviewed said that:

*“We entertain the audience with a drum ensemble. Today the favorites of most of audiences are jokes. We need to know about literature and have good general knowledge, a quick wit and a humorous bent and about the drum ensemble well and the basic of*

*Myanmar music. We sing for audiences if they wish it. Therefore a saing nau' hta should be well versed in music, drum circle playing and theatrical knowledge that his utterances are lively, up to the point and in good continuity. Sometimes some audiences like to be entertained while some others come with a critical eye and ear. The public were also taught and organize through their artistic skills, realize genuine national culture and value what is good for them in life".*

The study found that *Saingnau' hta* needs to know about the drum ensemble well and the basics of *Myanmar* music like timing with three bells and clapper to a bar and melody. Only if he is versed in basics of *Myanmar* music will he be able to sing a song in a proper manner and his commendations of the drum circle ensemble would have proper musical flavor. Mere articulateness only is not enough to make one a *saingnau' hta*. Therefore a *saingnau' hta* should be well versed in music, drum circle playing and theatrical knowledge that his utterances should be lively, up to the point and in good continuity. As described above, he must be knowledgeable about literature and have general knowledge, a quick wit and a humorous bent. When the lead drum player mistakenly ends his instrumental theme the *saingnau' hta* must be able to salvage the damages with spontaneous insight. For example, such a *saingnau' hta* would say with artificiality and the *saingnau' hta* would reply: and he proceeds to play the correct theme instead.

The audience at a drum-ensemble performance can include people of various types and age groups. Some are ordinary locals who hope to be entertained while some others come with a critical eye and ear. The latter have come to appreciate and encourage the instrumental play and virtuosity of the drum ensemble leader. They are watching to see if play by turns of the oboe and the drums, or their superimposition at the drum circle is up to the expert level or not. Now *saingnau' hta* each is positioned near the oboe player and the drum-circle player. Playing by turns, the two sides play in competition to win a bet. The audience especially those with a critical ear listen to the instrumental play with great interest. Apart from prods which form the expertness of *saingnau' hta*, he should be able to make presentations of facts on novitiation ceremony, Great Chronicle of the Buddhas, and facts on literature and music as and when necessary. Drum ensembles exist with a role to entertain the public and should also constitute a lively scene for their members. At the same time it is incumbent upon them to make the audience, through their artistic skills, realize genuine national culture and value it, organize and teach the public what is good for them in life.

According to *Myanmar* customs, arranging of entertainment with drum ensemble in novitiation ceremony, when members of a drum ensemble were interviewed they said that:

*"We play firstly "pwe: khaw" music to know and notice the place where held ahlu and entertain with drum ensemble. This music is very important and yekin music is also played".*

As mentioned, it is studied *pwe: khaw* instrumental of the two-headed big drum stands as a sign that a ceremony is in progress at a so and so place. For example, when "*lei: khin:*" (music to show of skill

in archery) is played the hearers excitedly become ready to participate in fighting. Then, when “*wei la*” instrumental is heard the hearer’s faculties are impressed with visions and sounds of waves and winds in turmoil at sea. Moreover, when *yekin* music is played with a drumstick striking at a small short drum called “*paloat toat*” mental clarity, stronger faith in.

Myanmar is known to hold the impression that *yekin* melody shows its best flavor only when accompanied by playing of gongs and the oboe. These phenomena are found in the relationship between Myanmar drum ensembles and Myanmar audiences, who, in some regions, enjoys its entertainment deep into the night. Therefore, instrumentalists and vocalists belonging to *Myanmar* drum ensemble are found to be connectors between it and the audience.

### **Discussion: The Evolution of *Myanmar* Traditional Musical Instruments in Society**

This paper has described the establishment of the *Myanmar* Drum Ensemble (“*saing wain*” in Myanmar). It has also observed its relationship to social and religious behaviors and practices in Myanmar social life. Myanmar traditional musical instruments have been influential in this way since the early *Pyu* Period AD 5 to AD 9 until the present time. The traditional Myanmar musical instruments gradually took course of evolution by inventions, originally based upon five items of materials. It had been taken for granted that the improvement of Myanmar music depended upon playing of instrument singularly. Furthermore, the fact that traditional Myanmar music was based upon those five materials and combination of those instruments as a band stands as an orchestra is significant, distinguished, genuine and symbolic of ancient Myanmar, culture.

According to Joan Gregg, several musical cultural areas of the world can be differentiated through all cultural areas show significant internal differences in details and have several rather than only one musical tradition (Joan Gregg, 1987). In some East Asian countries such as, China, Mongolia, Korea and Japan, their music is essentially melodic. But in the case of Myanmar drum ensemble, the components could produce a multi sound that is melodic as well as harmonic and rhythmic. In Southeast Asian area, percussion, gongs, xylophones, cymbals and bells predominate. In the case of *Myanmar* drum ensemble, predominant instruments are composed of a group of instruments instead.

### **Application of *Myanmar* Traditional Drum Ensemble**

The findings show that it is a customary practice of participation of a drum ensemble in almost all of the religious, royal and social occasions, festivals and ceremonies, because they believe that auspicious deeds are never complete without a drum ensemble. Different drum ensembles are given different social status according to their rank, place and class of the hosts.

Since the *Kone-baung* Period, in the event of ritual ceremonies for the good crops, the farmers invited ensembles to be played in the fields, prior to growing seasons; as well as in meritorious



ceremonies. Nowadays, most of the rich people hire drum ensembles and performers at all cost to make a grand and good merit ceremony. Studies of “*Kyauk Ain*” village have found a custom of the area that whatever the donation ceremony without a drum ensemble, should not be regarded as an “appropriate” donation (“*ahlu pein*” in Myanmar). Therefore, almost all donation ceremonies are conducted with drum ensemble entertainment.

Drum ensembles can be divided into three categories depending upon popularity, size, greatness, and hire-cost, village-level armature band, regional-level band and state-level band. It can be estimated that the social standard (wealth) of the donor by seeing the entertainment band of the donation. Actually, anyone could estimate not only the wealth of the donor but also his or her popularity, well-loved or well-liked or well-known by others or vice-versa. Nevertheless the custom of inclusion of drum ensemble in charity ceremonies it said to be an effective factor to preserve Myanmar traditions and culture. In any case, old Myanmar people were found to be unique in keeping tradition and culture if only they were in a good social and financial stratum to afford it. Nevertheless, decreases of following national characters are presumed to be based upon their bad economic status. Therefore it could be concluded that the “prosperity” of the people of a nation, tends to be a supporting factor to maintain, preserve and follow the national characters (such as tradition, custom, culture and spirit).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

According to the above-mentioned findings, it was learned that, the evolution of *Myanmar* traditional musical instruments was found in aspects of people's daily life as a symbolic cultural heritage. It can be concluded that survival of the *Myanmar* drum ensemble up to the present time is, its usage as essential entertainment item for the people who love, adore and get along at any time and place according to the event. Even when the *Myanmar* drum ensemble is not performed live in many of the social events and ceremonies, their tapes, CDs, and VCDs are used commonly. In *Myanmar* society, the drum ensemble is used as part of annual-cycle rituals, life-cycle rituals and crisis rituals in *Myanmar* society.

In conclusion, as roles of music, musical instruments, songs and dances in the *Pyu* Period is evident in the five brass figurines. Evidence such as stone inscriptions, motifs, paintings, and poems indicate the roles of the rhythmic ensembles, drum ensembles, and harps in the *Bagan* Period. It has been observed that drum ensembles (“*pa’ saing*” in Myanmar) emerged in the *Innwa* Period. The significance of drum music in the *Kone-baung* Period is apparent in the emergence of drum ensemble. In *Yadanabon* Period where the drum stage was decorated with mosaic and many more advancements in *Myanmar* music were found in the colonial period introduction of the gong ensemble. Today, a merger of both kinds of instruments is common. In spite of all these influences, the prestigious *Myanmar* drum ensemble which is based on the five basic instruments has survived due to typical *Myanmar* characteristic of preserving tradition, and the love of *Myanmar* of its culture.

It could be summarized that the *Myanmar* drum ensemble emerged from a merger of the Royal Music and the Folk Music from the *Kone-baung* period. It has three special characteristics: the Melodic Character, the Harmonic Character and the Rhythmic Character. Furthermore, the drum ensembles are known to have close relationships with the public throughout the colonial and the post-independence periods. Today the drum ensemble has closer contacts with people from the rural areas whereas city dwellers rely more on modern musical instruments for entertainment. Therefore, according to the evidences found out for that period, it was suggested that there has been usage of entertainments by, Mon drum ensemble, Thai drum ensemble and *Myanmar* drum ensemble in the palace. Nevertheless it can be assumed, according to the melody, and the way of playing, that the improvement based upon the style of *Myanmar* origin.

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