MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THE XƠ ĐĂNG IN QUẢNG NGÃI

Nguyễn Thế Truyền[1]

Abstract

In this paper on musical instruments in the cultural life of the Xơ Đăng people in Quảng Ngãi province, Vietnam, the author conducts an in-depth study of musical instruments in the social life of the Cadong people, a sub-ethnic group of the Xơ Đăng, who have long settled in the eastern foothills of the Trường Sơn mountain range in the northwest of Quảng Ngãi province, Vietnam.

The paper will systematically present issues related to the Xơ Đăng's chordophones, including classification, material, structure, and crafting methods; playing techniques; performance environments and instrument features; and the system of compositions of the Xơ Đăng's chordophones as well (V'roac, Goong, Kaní, and Rauốt).

This study was conducted some time ago based on the results of the author's survey and fieldwork in the following Xơ Đăng villages: Sơn Bua, Sơn Tân, Sơn Mùa, Sơn Dung (in Sơn Tây district), Trà Kem, and Trà Xinh (in Tây Trà district) of the Quảng Ngãi province.

Keywords

Vietnam, Xơ Đăng instruments, Cadong music, Xơ Đăng goongs, Cadong chordophones.

INTRODUCTION

The Xơ Đăng people comprise five communities, namely Xơ Teng, Tơ đrá, Mơ Nâm, Hà Lăng, and Cadong. The Cadong community mainly resides in the northwestern part of the Central Highlands, eastwards of the Trường Sơn mountain range, including the districts of Sơn Tây, Tây Trà, and Sơn Hà in the northwestern region of Quảng Ngãi province, Central Vietnam, with a population of 19,773 people as of December 31, 2015, according to the population census conducted by the Statistics Bureau of Quảng Ngãi province (Statistics Bureau of Quảng Ngãi province, 2015).

In addition, they also reside in settlements in the districts of Đắk Hà, Đắk Tô, Kon Plong in Kon Tum province, and Nam Trà My district in Quảng Nam province. The Xơ Đăng language belongs to the Mon-Khmer language family, a branch of the Austroasiatic language family. They mainly make a living through farming, gardening, livestock raising, hunting, gathering, and cultivating various crops such as corn, cassava, vegetables, pumpkins, cinnamon, betel nuts, jackfruit, bananas, and livestock raising, such as cows, pigs, chickens, ducks, etc. The majority of the population lives in difficult conditions, with only a very small proportion being wealthy.

They choose spacious areas on hillsides with low slopes, close to rivers and streams, to settle in villages (p'lây). Each village has many households and is usually named after the head of the village. The village is a basic social unit, with a production area, a cemetery, a residential area, and a boundary with other villages, which may be a stream, a river, a pass, or a slope.

The houses of the Xơ Đăng people are built on stilts (Figures 1-3), with materials made from wood, bamboo, thatch, and many pillars. They also build shelters to store rice and other crops in the forest, on the hillsides. In the past (some decades ago), each house usually accommodated multiple generations, with many families having 60 to 80 members living together. The Xơ Đăng people have

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traditional handicrafts, such as weaving, knitting, and forging. With their skilled hands and some tools such as hoes, axes, and knives, they build sturdy houses, baskets for women and men, and daily necessities. In the past, Xơ Đăng women also spun and wove fabrics to make costumes for themselves.

Figure 1: Xơ Đăng stilt house.[2]

Figure 2: Xơ Đăng stilt house and rice storage.

Figure 3: Daily work.

The Xơ Đăng people have religious beliefs in 'All things have Spirits'. They worship various Deities, such as the moon God, sun God, land and mountain Deities, tree Spirits, water Spirits, human Spirits, and rice Spirits. Therefore, they often hold ceremonies to worship the Deities when establishing a village, during epidemics or illnesses, when farming, harvesting rice, or offering water to the village, as well as holding life cycle ceremonies, festivals, and holidays.

Within the village, there is a shaman (called p'dâu) who performs ceremonies, communicates with spirits, and is knowledgeable about the various worship rituals. They are highly respected by the villagers.

In addition to customs, beliefs, and festivals, the Xơ Đăng people have many arts activities that are distinct and unique. These include singing, dancing, and playing musical instruments during festivals and holidays. They sing 'calêu' songs praising love between couples, perform 'ranghế' dances, play 'goongs' and 'flute' instruments, and various chordophones.

Music plays a particularly important and organic role in social life. It is the music of creative workers, transmitted, enjoyed, and preserved. It is not a professional and highly cultivated commercial

[2] All photographs, transcriptions and tables are made by the author.

culture where specific tasks are assigned between the creative, performing, and enjoying people. As a common characteristic of their culture, music is the music of life and exists within life, with specific social functions. It is not music designed for performances on stage.

Traditional musical instruments and their sounds have the ability to reflect the emotions, feelings, and aspirations of people in a certain social condition. The reflection contains profound human values and carries the imprint of a particular people and culture.

Like the musical instruments of other people living in Quảng Ngãi, the musical instruments of the Xơ Đăng people are worth to be investigated. The musical instruments here have not developed into becoming professional or academic musical instruments like that of the Kinh people. However, it is precise because they have not 'developed', that the musical instruments of the Xơ Đăng people have not been distorted by many factors and are always organically connected to social life and each member of the community throughout history.

Perhaps all Xơ Đăng musical instruments are important so there are no clear criteria for size in crafting. They are crafted by hand using locally available materials, mostly made by artisans themselves. Therefore, the dimensions mentioned in this study are the average size derived from the measurements of many instruments of the same type, or they are selected from one instrument that artisans consider to have the best sound and the most beautiful design.

Regarding the names of musical instruments, each people may have their own name. Therefore, each instrument can be present in many communities and many different regions, and the names can also be different. Therefore, when presenting each instrument, we will make comparisons. Transcribing music pieces using staff notation is not a simple task because their sounds are not in the diatonic musical scale system. In addition, there are many different versions, which are an essential feature of music and performing arts in general. To solve these problems, we collected many pieces, interviewed many artisans, and approached various types of Xơ Đăng musical instruments to filter and provide the best possible transcriptions. However, these transcriptions are certainly not perfect but only relatively accurate.

CLASSIFICATION OF XƠ ĐĂNG MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Traditional musical instruments have been classified according to their timbre or the materials used to make them. It was said that due to the use of different materials, musical instruments have their own unique timbres, contributing to the richness and diversity of music. This classification system has been used since ancient times and is consistent with the cosmic view and the eight-trigram model of 'four directions' and 'eight orientations' as having been accessed through the study of uncounted Chinese theories.

However, nowadays, few researchers use this classification system because a musical instrument can be made up of many different materials. For example: The goong instrument is made of bamboo tubes, a resonance box made of calabash, a string tensioner made of wood, and strings made of metal. Therefore, the goong instrument is composed of four materials in the eight-tone system: bamboo, calabash, wood, and metal. So, which category does this instrument belong to?

The kaní instrument has a tube made of bamboo, and the strings and mouthpiece are made of metal. Should kaní be classified as bamboo or metal in the so called 'eight-tone system'?

We also want to present our perspective on the classification of Xơ Đăng musical instruments. In studying musical instruments, our primary concern is issues related to instrumentation, such as shape, size, structure, function, and repertoire. However, when it comes to specific research issues, we have encountered many difficulties in deciphering them, partly because very few artisans understand or remember these issues, and sometimes their knowledge is not consistent with each other.

Here, we use the principles of musical instrument classification proposed by von Hornbostel and Sachs (1914). The value of this scientific method lies in its consistent criteria, which can be applied to the classification of musical instruments by all communities. Because of these advantages, it has been recognized by the International Council for Traditions in Music and Dance (ICTMD) under

UNESCO and is regularly reviewed and updated (Jähnichen, 2019). This method is based on two principles, as follows:

The source of material motion is what generates sound. From this source, musical instruments are divided into four major categories: string instruments based on string vibration; wind instruments based on the vibration of the air contained in an object; membrane instruments based on the vibration of a stretched membrane; and resonating body instruments based on the vibration of the entire musical instrument.

Here the method of sound production and the playing techniques are used to divide a category into subcategories. According to this classification method, Xơ Đăng's string instruments are divided into two subcategories: plucked string instruments, such as v'roac and goong; and bowed string instruments, such as kaní and rauốt.

Chordophones are commonly used by the Xơ Đăng people. It is characterized by the production of sound when its strings are struck or plucked in various ways. The Xơ Đăng people categorize chordophones into two types: those that are played by bowing and those that are played by plucking, which is consistent with the investigation.

Aerophones, on the other hand, are musical instruments that rely on the motion of air molecules contained within the instrument. Among the Xơ Đăng, aerophones are represented by instruments such as the tàlía flute, the amam flute, the ponpút zither, and the rangói zither. Xơ Đăng aerophones are further categorized into three subtypes: those that are played by blowing across a bird's feather, those that are played by blowing through a reed, and those that are played by striking.

Membranophone instrument is represented by the Hơgưr drum in Xơ Đăng music. It is a percussion instrument that produces sound by vibrating a membrane.

Idiophone is a class of musical instruments that produce sound when their entire body vibrates. The Xơ Đăng people have a vast and diverse collection of idiophones, including the ching năng and ching h'lênh sets. These instruments produce sound when struck or shaken, and their unique sounds are an integral part of Xơ Đăng musical culture.

Overall, the Xơ Đăng people have a musical heritage that is reflected in their diverse collection of musical instruments. The categorization of their instruments into various classes based on their sound production methods highlights the Xơ Đăng's deep understanding and appreciation of music. Their musical culture serves as a testament to the importance of music in human society, and it is an essential component of their identity and cultural heritage.

The summary of the classification of musical instruments among the Xơ Đăng people in Quảng Ngãi can be presented in Figure 4.

Chordophones		**Aerophones**			**Idiophones**			**Membrano-phones**
Plucked strings	Bowed strings	Bird feath-er-blown	Reed	Percussion	Struck	Vibrate	Tapped	hand percussion
V'roac Goong	Kaní rauốt	Amam Rangói	Tàlía	Ponpút/K'long pút	Ching goong	Grenneng	Tơrưng	Hơgưr

Figure 4: Table showing Xơ Đăng musical instrument classification.

There are three techniques of playing ching, which are using tools to strike, using a clenched fist to slam, and using knuckles to tap.

MATERIALS FOR MAKING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The Xơ Đăng people use materials available in nature to make their various musical instruments. Some musical instruments are made from only one material, while others are made from different

materials. The main materials used to make musical instruments are bamboo, leaves, rattan, animal hides, wood, calabash shells, and metal. For example:

Bamboo is used to make keys and bamboo strings. Leaves are used to make leaf trumpets. Rattan is widely used to make many different types of musical instruments because of its straightness, slimness (which creates vibration and resonance for sound), and stiffness (for old rattan). Musical instruments made from rattan include ponpút, tàlía, v'roac, đàn goong, rauốt, and more. Animal hides, such as deer hides, mongoose hides, wild boar hides, and cow and goat hides, are often used to make drums because they create a louder and more resonant sound than other types of hides. Wood (loong) is mainly used to make the neck of the instrument, the drumsticks, and pegs.

Calabash shells (đaah) are also an important material used to make Xơ Đăng musical instruments, such as V'roac, goong, and others.

Metal (mam) is used to make ching, a musical instrument that is considered the Xơ Đăng people's main instrument, which is made from bronze. Unlike other musical instruments, the craftsman who makes ching is also the person who makes the instrument. Until now, the Xơ Đăng people have not been able to produce ching themselves, and they have to buy or trade with Vietnamese people from Phuoc Kieu village, Dien Phuong commune, Dien Ban district, Quang Nam province, or from other regions, sometimes even from Myanmar, to obtain precious ching sets. Regarding the chordophones, in ancient times, the Xơ Đăng people used animal tendons to make strings. However, recently, they have learned to use metal strings, such as guitar or mandolin strings, and even used bicycle brake cables or telephone wires.

Other materials: In addition to the materials mentioned above, there are other materials such as forest bee wax used to connect the parts of musical instruments and some types of forest ropes used to make strings for instruments, such as k'jăh strings used for kaní or rauốt instruments.

Regarding the materials used to make Xơ Đăng musical instruments, they are summarized in Figure 5.

No	Crafting material	Usage	Instrument name	Note
1	Bambuseae	Body of instrument	chinh k'la	
		nail tack for drumhead	hơgưr	
2	Leaves	Body of instrument,	leaf flute	
3	Rattan	Body, tubes, and neck of instruments	v'roac, goong zither, rauốt, tàlía, tơrưng	
4	Animal skin	Drumheads	hơgưr	Drum
5	Wood	The neck of instrument, drum frame, Goong mallet	v'roac, kaní, hơgưr	
6	Bambusa balcooa	Body (neck) of instrument	goong zither, kaní, v'roac, vàpút	
7	Calabash	Soundbox	goong zither, v'roac, goong	
8	Brass		rattles, ching	
9	Iron	Strings	v'roac, goong zither, kaní	
10	Animal tendon	Strings	v'roac, goong zither, kaní	

11	Rope	Strings	kaní, rauốt	A type of forest rope
12	Beeswax	Attaching keys to neck	v'roac, kaní, rauốt	
13	Hemp rope	Tightening the strings of the musical instrument with the tuning rod	v'roac, goong zither	

Figure 5: Table showing Xơ Đăng musical instruments crafting materials.

The materials used to make musical instruments in this region exhibit a national and regional similarity, as it is located in a tropical monsoon climate zone with abundant sunlight and rainfall, which is suitable for the ecological system of plants and animals. Music researchers suggest that the music of Southeast Asian communities is made from bamboo, leaves, and rattan. Although the shape, size, function, and type of musical instruments used by the Xơ Đăng people may differ from those used by neighbouring communities, the issue of the materials used to make musical instruments contributes to the creation of a musical space and culture that is a constant cultural condition.

Figure 6: The Loong Đậu tree used to make the Ching dùi (tànố).

The materials used to make each musical instrument are closely related to the tone and colour of the music produced by each instrument. The tone colour, combined with elements of music such as melody, pitch range, and harmony, as well as the performance environment, will create values that are characteristic of their music, as well as the musical identity of each community, region, and locality.

STRING INSTRUMENTS OF THE XƠ ĐĂNG PEOPLE

No	**Xơ Đăng instruments**		**Equivalent instruments**	
1	Plucked	V'roac	Name	Communities
			B'ro	Communities in the Central Highlands
			B'rô	
			B'rôh	
2		Goong	K'râu	H'rê
			Tinh ninh (teng neng)	Ba Na

			Goong	Rơ Ngao (Ba Na), Giẻ Triêng, Ba Na
			Goong đe	Gia Rai, Giẻ Triêng, Rơ Ngao (Ba Na)
			Puôi brol	Giẻ Triêng (Đăk Glei – Kon Tum)
3	Bowed	Kaní	K'ny (kani)	Rơ Ngao (a sub-ethnic of Ba Na), Gia Rai, Ba Na
		Rauốt	K'đoh	Cor
			Cò	Kinh (Quảng Ngãi)

Figure 7: Table showing string instruments of the Xơ Đăng people according to von Hornbostel and Sachs' classification.

V'ROAC

The v'roac is a popular type of musical instrument in the musical and communal lives of the Xơ Đăng people. It is also widely used in the music of some communities in the Central Highlands, such as the Ba Na, Gia Rai, and Giẻ Triêng. The ethnic minorities in Quảng Ngãi, such as the Cor and H'rê, also have v'roac instruments. The main difference between the v'roac and the goong is the playing position of the two instruments; the v'roac is placed horizontally while the goong is mostly played standing up. The name v'roac is pronounced differently, such as b'ro, b'rô, and b'rôh. The Xơ Đăng people in Quảng Ngãi have three types of v'roac: v'roac triêng (two strings), v'roac tru (three strings), and v'roac rênh (five strings).

V'ROAC WITH TWO STRINGS (V'ROAC TRIÊNG)

The structure and manufacturing process of the v'roac include two main parts: the body of the instrument (called đaah) and the neck. The string of the instrument is usually hung on a rack in front of the house or the farm. The craftsmen carefully select round calabashes of the right size to make the instrument. The body of the instrument is a hollowed calabash, with both ends cut off and dried thoroughly.

The height of the calabash when cut is 18 cm, and the diameter is 20 cm. The neck of the instrument is tied horizontally through the stem of the calabash with a thin and sturdy forest string, usually made of rattan. The calabash becomes the resonating chamber, creating a unique and aesthetically pleasing appearance.

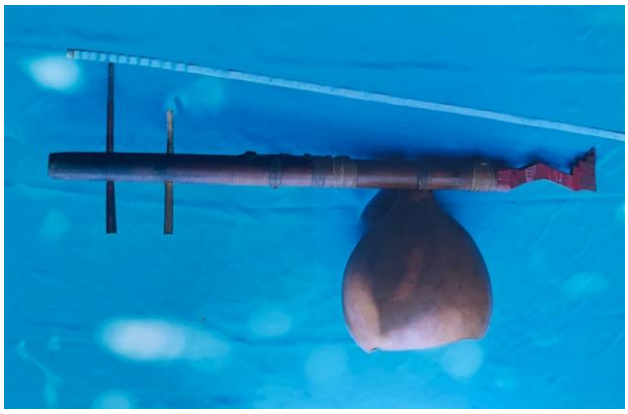


Figure 8: The Xơ Đăng people's two-stringed V'roac.

Recently, some artisans in the Sơn Hà region have replaced the calabash with a small aluminium basin (often used to hold water) for the v'roac body. This produces a more resonant sound but lacks the warm and sentimental tone of using a calabash.

The neck of the v'roac is made from a piece of bamboo (called h'đjaah) or a type of wood called lồ ô, with a length of approximately 47–62 cm and a diameter of about 2.7–3.7 cm. The neck is a crucial part of the v'roac instrument. The craftsman must select mature bamboo or wood that is straight to create the best and most durable v'roac instruments. The neck has a hole for the insertion of the xê

v'roac and a handle for holding the strings. There are five small wooden frets on the neck, made of gạo wood, which are glued onto the neck using beeswax.

The v'roac has two metal strings, usually made from guitar strings (the first or second string) or mandolin strings. Sometimes, even telephone wires or bicycle brake cables are used because there are no specific v'roac strings available on the market. The two strings are set close to each other, with one string close to the neck and the other string about 4 cm away. The string that is set closer to the frets is called the ‘wife’ string, while the other is called the ‘husband’ string.

In terms of playing technique, the v'roac musician uses their right hand to pluck the strings to create sound. Specifically, the index and middle fingers are used to pluck the ‘wife’ string, which is responsible for the melody, while the thumb is used to pluck the "husband" string, which provides a bass accompaniment. The "husband" string is also used to create rhythmic patterns.

The left hand presses down on the frets to create different notes and uses various finger techniques, such as vibrato and slides, to achieve different effects. The left hand is also responsible for muting or damping the strings when necessary.

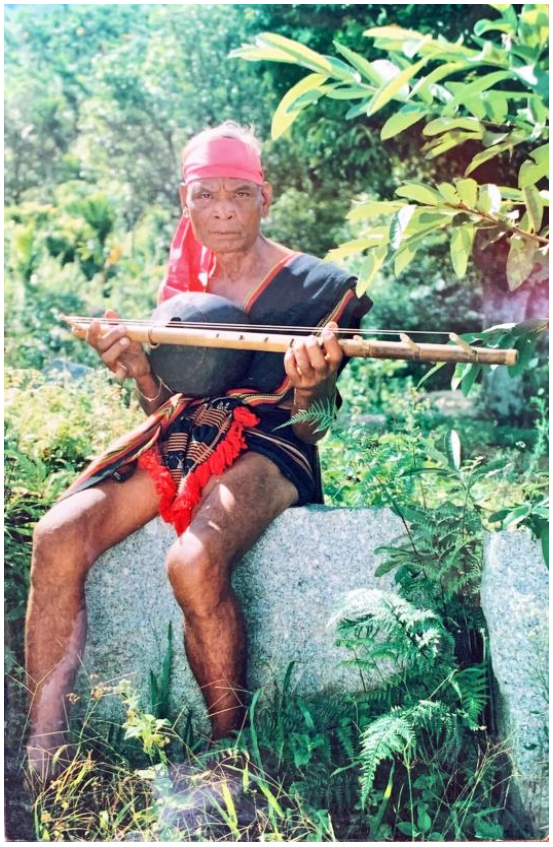


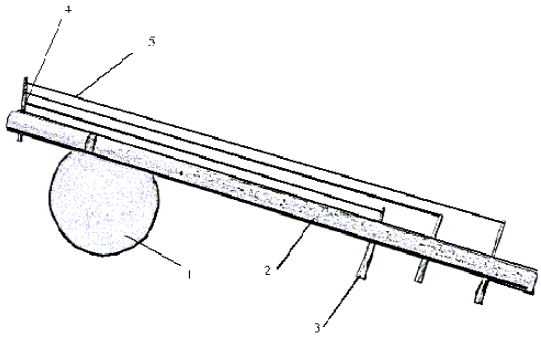
Figure 9: Đinh Văn Đó in Huy Em hamlet, Sơn Mùa commune, Sơn Tây.

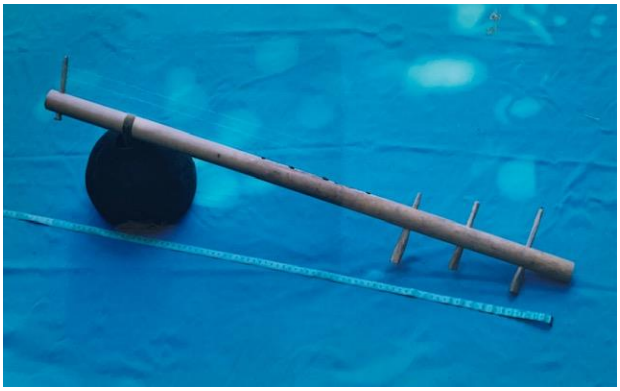
The v'roac is used for solo performances of personal melodies and to simulate the sounds of traditional community ching songs.

The v'roac is used in a variety of performance environments, such as festivals and community gatherings in traditional longhouses, especially during cool moonlit nights when young men often play romantic music to express their love. Additionally, the v'roac can be used to play gentle and warm melodies for lullabies to soothe babies and children. The sound of the two strings of the v'roac is typically tuned to a perfect fourth or fifth.

In the Xơ Đăng tale ‘The Legend of the Rice Plant and the Calabash’, it is said that the calabash was brought back by a bird after a devastating flood from across the sea. The calabash longed for its homeland and remembered the perilous journey across the sea, which was heard in the beautiful and unique sound of the v'roac (Đinh Xăng Hiền, Nguyễn Thanh Mừng, 1988: 7).

V'ROAC WITH THREE STRINGS (V'ROAC TRU)





(Note: 1. Soundbox, 2. Body, 3. Tuning peg,
4. Bridge, 5. Strings)

Figure 10a: The Xơ Đăng people's three-stringed V'roac. Figure 10b: The three-stringed V'roac made by artisan Vá Kam in Sơn Mùa commune, In Sơn Tây district.

The repertoire of the v'roac is quite diverse, encompassing a wide range of everyday life themes. In addition, the instrument can also simulate the sounds of traditional ching ensembles.

The *Ching Dơh Ching Ngây* song, performed by artisan Va Kam (from Huy Em village, Sơn Mùa commune, Sơn Tây district), has a lively and rhythmic melody. The melody of this ching song is played within a range of a perfect eighth. The range of the instrument is very narrow, but it still captivates the people, perhaps due to its familiarity and close connection. However, in recent years, due to the increasing cultural exchange and blending of music, the v'roac tru three-string instrument is less commonly used by the younger generation.

Ching Dơh Ching Ngây is a piece of music that is noted down as it was usually played by Vá Kam in the unit Huy Em of the village Sơn Mùa in the district Sơn Tây.

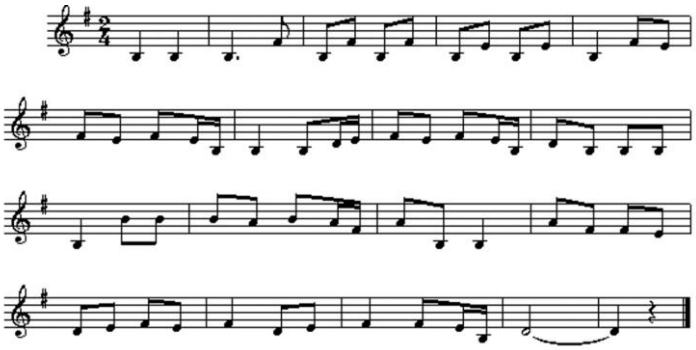


Figure 11: *Ching Dơh Ching Ngây* is a piece of music that is noted down as it was usually played by Vá Kam in the unit Huy Em of the village Sơn Mùa in the district Sơn Tây.

The Cor and H'rê people in Quảng Ngãi province rarely use the v'rooc tru three-string instrument like the Xơ Đăng people. They may be more accustomed to using the two-stringed instrument (with one string responsible for melody and one string for harmony). Compared to the b'ro of the Cor people and the b'rooc of the H'rê people, the sound of the v'rooc tru three-string instrument of the Xơ Đăng people is reflecting a wider range of musical content.

V'ROAC WITH FIVE STRINGS (V'ROAC RÊNH)

The v'roac five-string instrument (v'roac rênh) has five strings tuned from low to high as follows:c1 - d1 - e1 - f1 - g1.

Figure 12: The Xơ Đăng people's five-stringed V'roac.

GOONG ZITHER

The goong zither is also known as v'roac k'râu in some Cadong areas of Sơn Dung and Sơn Mùa. Communities in the North Central Highlands have different names for this instrument, such as goong and goong-de (Gia Rai, Rơ Ngao, Giẻ Triêng). The Ba Na people in An Khê district (Gia Lai province) call it the tinh ninh instrument (or teng neng); the Giẻ Triêng people in Dak Glei (Kon Tum province) call it the puoi brol instrument; and the H'rê people in Quảng Ngãi province call it the k'râu instrument. During our survey of rural areas, we did not see the Cor people in Quảng Ngãi using this instrument.

The goong instrument has a similar shape to the v'roac, but it does not have frets. It is larger than the v'roac and has 5 to 15 strings.

The structure of the goong instrument consists of two main parts: the soundbox (đaah) and the neck (xey). The soundbox is made from the shell of an old calabash, cut off at both ends. The height of the soundbox is 17–23 cm, and the diameter is 22–27 cm. The soundbox is attached to the neck.

The neck is usually made from bamboo or rattan. People often choose straight and sturdy bamboo or rattan (old and dried) that has been sun-dried or heated to ensure stability in sound. If the neck is made from fresh bamboo or rattan, it will shrink, making it difficult to tune the strings and arrange the bridge later. The neck is about 47–62 cm long and 4–5.5 cm in diameter.

Typically, 11 strings are tied to the neck without frets. At the top of the neck, small red-hot iron rods are inserted into the neck to create small holes for tuning the instrument. The tuning pegs are made from hardwood or old bamboo. At the other end is the bridge, where the strings are fixed onto a small piece of hardwood. Nowadays, some artisans even use broken metal umbrella frames to tie the strings to the instrument for extra stability. For many years, metal or nylon strings have replaced the traditional animal tendon or jute strings in this instrument of the Xơ Đăng people.

Figure 13: (left) The Xơ Đăng people's nine-stringed Goong in Sơn Mùa commune, Sơn Tây district. Figure 14: (right) A Goong performance posture of the Xơ Đăng people.

The sound of the goong instrument is entirely produced by the plucked strings, creating a smooth and melodious sound. The playing technique of the goong instrument does not involve fretting or sliding fingers on the strings, but its advantage lies in the harmonization and the excellent coordination of multiple strings played by the performer's fingers.

The goong instrument is a type of instrument used by both men and women and is often played for traditional songs such as calêu, ranghế, dêôdê, and more. Its sound can simulate all of the ching melodies of the Xơ Đăng people. The sound of the goong zither instrument is produced entirely by the plucked strings, creating a smooth and melodious sound.

The goong zither instrument of the Xơ Đăng people usually has 5–15 strings, but the most common type has 7 or 9 strings.

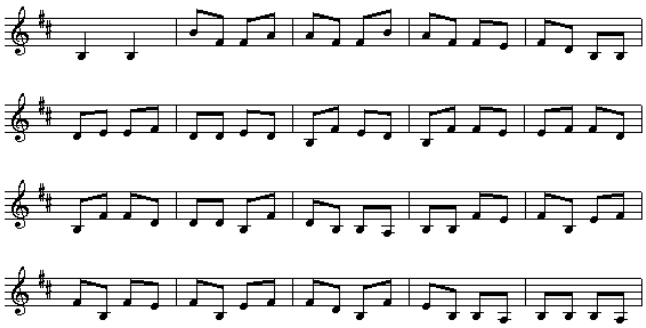


Figure 15: Another example is *Xóm Đăk Tu*, here shown as an excerpt.

Regarding the repertoire, in addition to traditional songs such as calêu, ranghế, dêôdê, the strength of goong performance lies in simulating the sound of ching instrments, such as the Đăk Tu melody. The music piece Đăk Tu, performed solo by Đinh Túc on a nine-stringed v'rooc k'râu, is seemingly a masterpiece.

Xom Đăk Tu (also known as P'lây Đăk Tu) of the Xơ Đăng people is a beautiful rural area that is reflected in many songs and music pieces, such as the song *Calêu Đăk Tu* (in the melody of dêôdê), the Đăk Tu ching, and more.

The music piece consists of two parts: the first part (lively and cheerful) has 56 measures in a 2/4 time signature, and the second part (gradually faster) has 24 measures (including the pick-up measure). Therefore, the total music piece here has 80 measures in a 2/4 time signature, which in reality may be more or less following the 'open mechanism' rule in the performance of culture.

It can be said that through the consecutive single-hook melody with a 2/4 time signature, the Đăk Tu music piece has created a feeling of joy and brought people closer to the wild nature with the sound of birds, wind, and flowing water. The consecutive single-hook melody with a 2/4 time signature here has been very effective in terms of musical techniques.

KANÍ

Figure 16: (left) The Xơ Đăng people's Kaní. Figure 17: Kaní performance posture.

The musical instruments belonging to the Xơ Đăng people's chordophone instruments in Quảng Ngãi include two types: the kaní and the rauốt. Other North Central Highlands communities, such as the Rơ Ngao (Ba Na) and Gia Rai, also have this type of instrument. The Xơ Đăng and H'rê people in Quảng Ngãi also call this instrument rơđoang. The Xơ Đăng people may call this musical instrument by the name used by the H'rê people (a neighbouring community). Particularly, the Xơ Đăng and H'rê people have many similarities in the making and use of this musical instrument. According to our investigation, the Xơ Đăng people in Sơn Tây region have this type of instrument, but the Xơ Đăng people in the Tây Trà region (Trà Xinh district) do not have this type of instrument.

In terms of the form of the instrument and the sitting position for playing, the kaní is similar to the cò instrument of the Kinh people. The instrument has one string made of animal tendons, silk thread, pineapple fibre, or nylon. Recently, people have started making it with metal strings. The instrument neck is a 60-cm-long bamboo tube, and the bow is a small bamboo stick. On the instrument body, artisans use beeswax to attach 4 to 5 frets called vú mói, vú páy, vú pí, and vú pun. Under the string, there is a thread tied to a piece of metal (a thin aluminium piece or a piece cut from a beer can). Interestingly, the structure of the kaní instrument does not have a resonant box; instead, it has the performer's mouth cavity as the resonant chamber.

In the performance, the artist sits and uses the left foot to hold the wooden head of the instrument. The right hand pulls the bow onto the string to create sound. The mouth holds a metal piece with a thread tied to the string. At this point, the artist's mouth cavity becomes an excellent resonant chamber. The sound volume and melody colour always directly depend on the flexible and agile changes of the mouth cavity when opening and closing.

The kaní is a musical instrument played mainly by the Xơ Đăng people during the spring or after the harvest season. It is also used for socializing and matchmaking purposes. The instrument produces sounds that are close to human voices, allowing the players to convey their messages effectively.

Unlike other string instruments like the v'roac and goong, the kaní is mostly used by older men. In the past, it was only played in the forest as it was believed to produce the sounds of spiritual beings. However, this taboo has been mostly forgotten nowadays. The sound of the kaní is similar to singing and has a mystical and captivating quality.

The kaní has four frets, producing the notes c2, d2, fis2, g2, and a2. However, the pitch of these notes may not be entirely accurate due to the half-string, half-vocal technique used to produce the sound. The sound is transmitted from the strings to the metallic piece inside the mouthpiece, producing a non-standard frequency range.

The kaní has a limited repertoire, including songs such as Tự sự, Trai gái tự tình, and Mẹ ru con ngủ. The melodies are smooth, cheerful, and playful, with a 2/4 time signature and interwoven rhythms.

Although the sound of the kaní is unique, it has a limited volume. Some communities in the Northwest Highlands of Vietnam have added a dried gourd shell (b'rooc) to the instrument to increase its volume without affecting its playing technique or repertoire. However, this modification should be carefully considered as the kaní is primarily used for personal expression, lullabies, and socializing purposes.

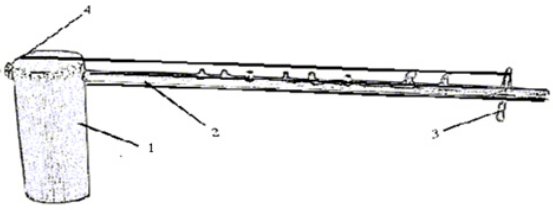
Changes in volume may also affect the quality of the sound and the social function of the instrument. Therefore, it is important to preserve the traditional playing techniques and understand the cultural significance of the kaní in the Xơ Đăng community.

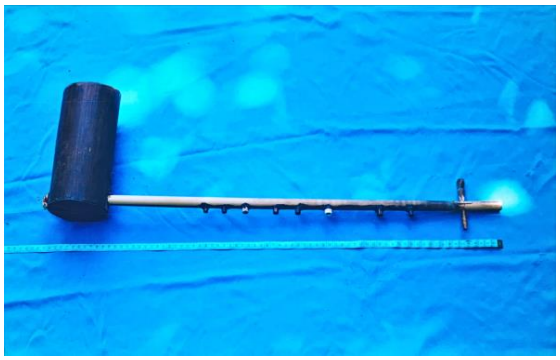
RAUỐT

The rauốt (a traditional Vietnamese musical instrument) has a structure similar to the cò instrument (a two-stringed instrument) of the Kinh people, but the rauốt has frets while the cò instrument does not.

The rauốt has four main parts: the resonator box, the body, the neck, and the bridge. The resonator box, body, neck, and bridge are usually made of high-quality wood. The resonator box is typically

made from a bamboo or rattan stem, while the body is made from a straight and sturdy piece of wood, like a half piece of wood. The neck and bridge are also made from high-quality wood.





Note: 1. Soundbox, 2. Body, 3. Tuning peg, 4. Bridge.

Figure 18: (left) The Xơ Đăng people's Rauốt in Quảng Ngãi. Figure 19: (right) The Xơ Đăng people's Rauốt.

The playing technique and sound production of the rauốt are equivalent to the đàn cò of the Kinh people. The player of the rauốt usually sits on the ground with their big toe holding onto the resonator box, one hand holding the neck of the instrument, and the other hand using a thin bamboo stick placed close to the strings and pulled.

Performance environment: The rauốt is a musical instrument for men only (women do not use this instrument) widely used in the activities of the Xơ Đăng community.

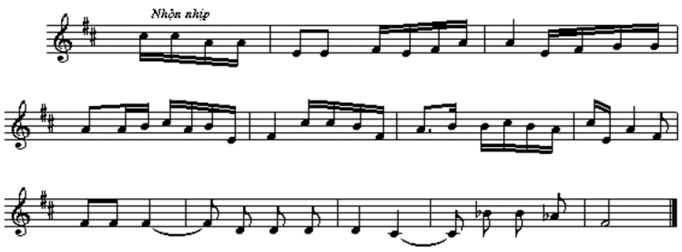


Figure 20: (left) Rauốt performance. Figure 21: (right) Using the hand to pluck and the bow! This is the implication of this piece of music.

The solo performance of the rauốt playing *Ranghế Lempui* (a joyful tune) by the artist Vá Y Vê (from Sơn Mùa commune, Sơn Tây) is a very unique piece of music. Here, Vá Y Vê performed the rauốt using two different skills, which are using the hand to pluck and using the bow.

This demonstrates the Xơ Đăng people's love for the Ranghế tune, a common melody in Xơ Đăng music. In fact, in the distant history of music, songs came first, and then, with a creative mind, humans invented sound-producing tools and musical instruments to serve their spiritual life.

CONCLUSION

The music of the Xơ Đăng people has rich expressive content, unique playing techniques, and characteristics. The people have a particular love for music and a talent for this type of art. Therefore, music and musical instruments have been an integral part of their social life and have been maintained until today.

In the case of some pieces of Xơ Đăng music that mimic the sounds of goongs, we believe that, fundamentally, they existed before goongs were introduced from other regions. We hear and feel the fusion of basic sounds of goongs in today's social life, still preserved in bamboo and nứa musical instruments, such as the three-stringed v'rooc instrument (songs like *ching dơh ching ngây*, …).

Music in the social life of the Xơ Đăng people is performed in an open mechanism, which is characteristic of their music as well as performance art in general.

The music of the Xơ Đăng people is an invaluable cultural heritage, not only for themselves but also for containing the cultural values of music in the Southeast Asian region. Historical origins and cultural values of musical instruments in the social life of the Xơ Đăng people need further in-depth research in future projects.

In conclusion, the study of Xơ Đăng musical instruments is a vital aspect of preserving and promoting their cultural heritage. Further research is necessary to fully understand the history, cultural significance, and value of Xơ Đăng music and musical instruments. This research can help preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the Xơ Đăng people and contribute to the larger field of musicology.

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