



The SUPPORT Arts and Crafts
International Centre of Thailand
(Public Organization)



Artisanal Handicraft

Khong Mon Head Carving



Khong Mon is in a curve shape setting upward on both sides. It has a base underneath, unlike other kinds of Thai Khong Wong that are normally placed right on the floor.

A frame of a Khong or gong is usually made of wood, carved into various patterns and decorated with gold leaves or glass. A head part is called “Hua Khong Mon”. Its main feature is that it is commonly carved into the face of phra or deva which looks like Mon people. A middle part is a curve of a gong. It is commonly carved into Kranok Baites pattern. At the end of the frame is made into a tail of Kinnarah or Thai patterns that match with the head part.



An end part of Khong Mon



Style Kes Loi: a top part above a hero's face carved in a round relief which does not stick with a head of a gong



Style Kes Norn: a carved top part above a hero's face that stick with a head of a gong

Identity of Khong Mon Head Carving

Identity of Khong Mon Head Carving can be classified into 2 types as follows:

“**Kes Loi**” carving is to carve a top part above a hero's face in a round relief which does not stick with a head of a gong.

“**Kes Norn**” is to carve a top part above a hero's face to stick with a head of a gong.

A head of a gong is commonly made of teak thanks to its durability and strength. It can be easily carved into various patterns. Apart from teak, wood from jackfruit tree, Burma padauk, Burma Blackwood can also be used. Importantly, it must be more than 12 inches wide. The wood must be flawless, has no splinter or remaining resin in the wood, otherwise such wood is not beautiful.



Small Khong Mon



Khong Mahori: a gong in
Thai grand orchestra



Khong Mong



Khong Rabeng

A gong can be divided into various types as follows:

A gong in Thai grand orchestra which can be further divided into a small and a big one. This is a gong played exclusively in Thai grand orchestra. Initially, it consisted of a series of 17 small gongs which was later on added to have 18 ones. To hit this kind of gong, use a stick attached with a metal sheet and hit at a gong to create melodious sound.

Khong Mon can be divided into a small and a big one. It consisted of a series of 15 small gongs, made of metal. A wooden frame is made of carved wood which is decorated with gold leaves or glass.

Khong Rabeng, in 1 set, there are 3 gongs hung over a wooden rail. Each one renders a range of low to high pitch. In the past, it was used in Rabeng performance. However, it becomes unpopular now.

Khong Wong Yai is the main musical instrument to provide the skeletal melody for other instruments, such as Piphat Khoo or Thai Grand Orchestra. Khong Wong Yai consists of melodious sound and a gong in a rattan frame or a rail wood bend into a semi-circle shape. The player sits in the center of the circle. It has 16 tuned bossed gongs made of brass.

Khong Wong Lek is made in a smaller size than other gongs in general. There are 18 gongs used to play along with Khong Wong Yai. Because of its small size, it renders high and bright pitch.

Khong Hui is the biggest gong which is played in auspicious ceremony.

Khong Mong is hit to provide rhythm. It renders bass and vibrant sound. It looks like Khong Hui but smaller. A gong itself is made of alloy, such as brass or bronze.

Gong: Musical Instrument Wisdom

A gong is the musical instrument that is made of alloy. It represents national identity and culture. A gong was discovered in the southern part of China, in the area of Yunnan province and in South East Asia, such as Burma, Laos and Thailand around 4,000 years ago.

A gong is a percussion instrument. A gong itself is made of a metal sheet with a bulge in the middle. A beater is made of wood with a thick cloth bulge at one end. Thanks to its reverberate sound, it is commonly played in rites. For example, it was used to signal in wars in the past or even in religious rites.



Khong Mon: Old Musical Instrument of Mon People

Khong Mon is a percussion instrument. It is an ancient instrument that got influence from Mon. In Mon language, it is called “Padgao” or “Mongjakkitao”. In Burmese language, Khong Mon is called Lasan which means “circular” or “crescent” according to its shape because both Mon and Burma consider from a shape of a gong which is bent upward like a circular moon.

A pattern on Khong Mon is delicate and beautiful. Initially, Khong Mon was placed at the far end of a band. Later, it was moved to place at the front to show patterns of a gong which is an identity of Khong Mon. This Khong Mon is considered as the first-class level musical instrument thanks to its sound that can be played in harmony with other instruments. It is also used to tune the sound with other musical instruments.

The first Khong Mon was introduced during the reign of King Rama 6. It is currently well reserved at the National Museum. In the past, famous Khong Mon carvers stayed in the area of Thonburi and Wat Pra Pirenth in Worajak area, Pra Nakorn.

Khong Mon is in a curve shape setting upward on both sides. It has a base underneath, unlike other kinds of Thai Khong Wong that are normally placed right on the floor. A frame of a gong is usually made of wood, carved into various patterns and decorated with gold leaves or glass. There is a pedestal to support in the middle of a gong, similar to that of an alto xylophone. There are 2 kinds of Khong Mon similar to Thai Khong Wong, which are, Khong Mon Wong Yai and Khong Mon Wong Lek. There are 15 gongs in Khong Wong Yai and 16 gongs in Khong Wong Lek. It is played in Raman Piphat. It can be played in both auspicious and inauspicious ceremonies. At present, it is commonly played in funeral ceremony.



Main components of Khong Mon include:

A gong frame is made of rattan curved into a semi-circle shape. A gong is carved into patterns. It is made into a figure of Kinnarah at one end and as a tail of Kinnarah at the other end.

A gong is made of metal that is melt and lathed into a disc shape with a bulge in the middle.

A beater is made of old bamboo, sharpened into a long and round shape. Initially, a header part was covered with skin of an elephant. However, due to scarcity of skin of an elephant, nowadays, cloth is used to wrap the head part instead.



Gong fram



Look Khong or small gongs



Beater



A head part of a gong



A middle part of a gong



An end part of a gong

Khong Mon Head Carving: A handicraft which reflects artisan's skills

Khong Mon

Carving is made as high-relief with its unique features, consisting of 3 parts, including a head, middle and an end parts.

- Khong” (on the left of a player). Its main feature is that it is commonly carved into the face of deva or Kinnarah

- curve of a gong. It is commonly carved into Kranok Baites pattern.

- An end part (on the right of a player). It is commonly carved into a tail of Kinnarah or other Thai patterns that look aligned with a head part of a gong. It is decorated with gold leaves or pearl.

Generally, Khong Mon is made in a shape of a tamarind pod, a monk's alms-bowl and a crescent, depending on convenience and a grace look of a player. Therefore, proportion can vary depending on suitability.



Chisel

Materials used in carving

A wood hammer, resemble to a small mallet, made of hard wood, such as rosewood. It is light weight so it is not exhaustive while using. It also helps prolong the usage of a grip of a chisel.

A chisel is the most important tool in carving. There are various kinds of a chisel for different purposes, such as for digging, twisting or a firmer gouge. It is made of hard and tough steel. It must be always sharpened.

A knife, a small acuminate knife, is used to carve small patterns or a small gouge.

A saw is used to saw unwanted parts of wood out to form a structure.

A file is used to run down a work after being carved. Sandpaper is used to polish the work one more time.

A plane is used to make the wood surface and edge flat and smooth before carving or decorating afterwards.

A drill is used to make a hole for further carving or perforating.

A bracket or a pen is used to hold the wood.

Other tools, such as a pencil, tracing paper, paper board

Decoration tools, such as lacquer, stained glass, gold leave, marl, shellac, thinner, wood paint.



Gold leaf



How to carve a head of Khong Mon

Designing or molding a pattern

This is a step to prepare a pattern or a draft of a pattern for carving of 3 parts. A carver must know how to design. Also, he is supposed to know a characteristic of wood to be carved, such as splinter. Generally, a head part is carved into a pattern of a protagonist, Kinnarah, male deva, a pattern of cotton rose tied with a pattern of Kranok Baites. According to the belief that there is always a teacher in traditional Thai music, a pattern in carving is therefore a high-class one to represent respect to a musical teacher at the same time.

Perforate a draft pattern

Perforate a draft pattern and place it on a glued wood surface. Use a dabber to spread white powder over the draft pattern. Once remove a paper, a pattern will be reflected on a wood surface as drafted. At present, a pencil or a felt-tip pen is used to directly draw on the wood instead.

Roughly shaping to form

This is a step to use a tool to remove some parts of the wood to form a clearer shape and proportion, similar to a semi-finished form. After that, roughly shape to make it similar to a pattern.





Carving a pattern

This is a step to use various kinds of chisel to carve to create patterns. A wood hammer is also used to nail and a chisel is used to gouge, to level off and to carve as desired.

Gouging

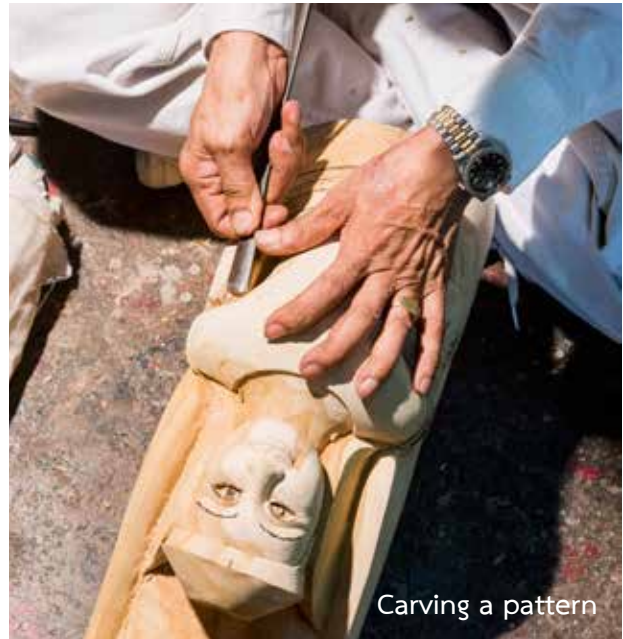
This is a step to use a chisel to hammer along an outline of a pattern. Hang upon constantly while hammering to get the gouge at the same depth.

Putting the wood together

This is a step to put a head, a middle and a tail part that have been already carved to form into a shape of a gong. A wedge is used to hold each part together according to ancient wisdom. Due to heavy weight of a gong that make it difficult to transfer, therefore a carver designs it to be easily assembled or disassembled.

Polishing and decorating

Polishing a surface is done by putting soft-prepared chalk over a wood surface to close all tiny holes and to smoothen a surface before decorating. As for a decorating step, normally it is done by lacquering or other methods, such as gilding, painting, mother-of-pearl inlaid. At this step, a carver must polish a surface and follow by putting powder color mixed with shellac to remove splinter and tiny holes. Do it at least two times before covering with lacquer.



Carving a pattern



Putting the wood together



Decoration



Playing and taking care of Khong Wong

A player sits squat on the floor in a polite attitude or sits on the haunches inside a circle of a gong. Use a forefinger and a thumb to carry a beater. Use other fingers to hold a beater.

When move a gong, lift it by one person. Hold it in parallel along the floor or in an upright position. Never turn it upside down. To maintain a Khong Wong, use dry or damp cloth to wipe it. Keep a beater in a bag properly.

Carving Khong Mon is considered an ancient

craft that reflects wisdom and craftsmanship of a carver through exquisite patterns. It requires expertise, patience and skill in designing and lacquering along the way. Any carver possess both skills, he is regarded as an expert carver.

Even though a carver possesses comprehensive skills, experience and skill in using tools can differentiate delicacy among each work. Carving is therefore regarded an important craft, because apart from being a source of income of a producer, it is also considered as a high-class craftsmanship which represents the arts of Thailand.



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