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THE PEK BU PLAYED BY THE LUN BAWANG, ITS PERFORMANCE AND MUSIC

Connie Lim Keh Nie

INTRODUCTION

Pek bu, plucked bamboo zither, made from a node of a large bamboo known by its local name, bulu' betung by the Lun Bawang can be described as idiochordic, due to its physical outlook. The playing style is a combination of idiophone and chordophone families of musical instruments (Matusky, 1986). This idiochordic instrument is commonly found in Sarawak, Kalimantan and Sabah with different names known by its tribal group. Although they vary in size and tuning they are similar in construction. This article aims to examine the construction of the instrument, performance technique and its repertoire. The discussion will be confined to the Lun Bawang *pek bu* players found in Long Tuma, Lawas Damit and Long Semadoh in Lawas District.

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THE PHYSICAL CONSTRUCTION

Pek bu is constructed from a length of large, straight bamboo tubing, which is closed at both ends by the natural bamboo nodes. The strings of the instrument are the bamboo strips which are finely cut from the surface of the bamboo tube itself. Thus, the strings are still attached to the tube at both ends. Two small rectangular-shape bridges (called *bulu'*), made of dried wood or bamboo are inserted beneath each end of the individual string. The bridge functions as a tuning peg, and can be moved to shorten or lengthen the vibrating string to set it to a specific pitch. A narrow slit is cut lengthwise through the bamboo wall almost to the full length of the tube to

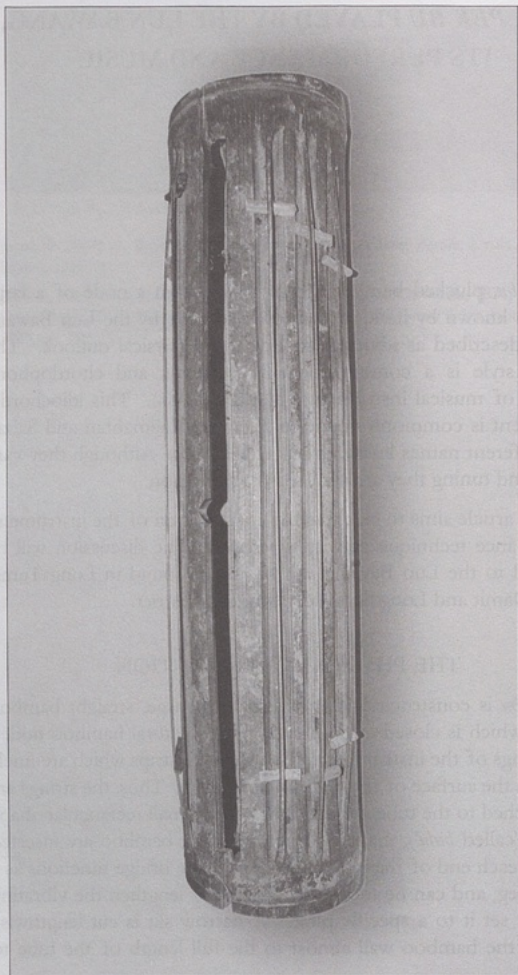


Fig. 1: Lun Bawang bamboo zither, *pek bu*.

(Photograph: Ipoi Datan)

make the bamboo tube more powerful in terms of loudness and deep ringing sound. There are three parallel strings on the left and one on the right side of the slit. These four finely cut longitudinal strings are of the same size (see Fig. 1).

During the field recording in 2005, I had observed the construction of *pek bu* by Sigar Padan of Long Tuma, Lawas Damit and Semali Panai of Long Semadoh Rayeh, Long Semadoh. A comparison of the measurement and construction of the instruments are as shown in the following tables:

Table 1: Measurement and construction of *pek bu* by Sigar Padan.

	Measurement (in cm)			
	1 st string	2 nd string	3 rd string	4 th string
Length	32 cm	31.5 cm	32 cm	35 cm
Height (from the body of instrument)	1.3 cm	1.3 cm	0.9 cm	1 cm
Thickness	0.2 cm	0.2 cm	0.2 cm	0.2 cm

- The four strings on the *pek bu* have been numbered 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th from left to right as the player faces the instrument.

Table 2: Measurement and construction of *pek bu* by Semali Panai.

	Measurement (in cm)			
	1 st string	2 nd string	3 rd string	4 th string
Length	27.5 cm	26.5 cm	30 cm	32 cm
Height (from the body of instrument)	1.3 cm	1.2 cm	0.8 cm	0.9 cm
Thickness	0.2 cm	0.2 cm	0.2 cm	0.2 cm

- The four strings on the *pek bu* have been numbered 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th from left to right as the player faces the instrument.