

KAREN INDIGENOUS MUSIC AND DANCE LEARNING IN AN
AUSTRALIAN NON-FORMAL CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY IN
MAINTENANCE AND TRANSMISSION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the viability of transmission and maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance in an Australian non-formal context. Qualitative in design, the research comprised an ethnographic case study of an indigenous music and dance transmission situation (a series of five music and dance workshops) implemented in a non-formal community context in Western Sydney. Participants were a Karen cultural expert in music and dance, four Karen teacher participants and 14 Karen youth student participants. The researcher, as performance participant and participant observer, collected the data through field observation and video recording of the workshops, as well as semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the cultural expert, teacher participants, and the student participants. The first of its kind among the Karen community in Australia, the study explored the viability and means of transmission and maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance through the involvement of Karen culture bearers and Karen youth. The study explored the views of the cultural expert and the various other culture bearers on Karen music and dance teaching and learning processes, as well as the motivation and learning styles of its student participants. Based on understandings of transmission processes operating in Burma and in the Thai-Burma border refugee camps that emerged during the study, the research revealed the need for evolving modified transmission processes for the diasporic context. The study raised many questions and highlighted culturally sensitive issues, ultimately indicating that the symbolic significance of the project as an initiative outweighed the pedagogical outcomes of the actual workshops.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	5
Karen music and dance culture.....	5
<i>Social context</i>	5
<i>Musical links to surrounding peoples</i>	6
<i>External interest in Karen musical culture and its direction</i>	6
Indigenous music transmission.....	7
<i>Modes of transmission</i>	7
<i>Teacher-student relationship</i>	8
<i>Learners' experience and authenticity</i>	8
<i>The impact of modernisation on traditional music transmission</i>	9
Refugees and the maintenance and continuation of musical traditions.....	10
<i>Diasporic identity and the culture of musical learning and practice</i>	10
<i>Cultural maintenance and preservation</i>	11
<i>Community-based music learning</i>	12
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY	13
Introduction	13
Research design and setting.....	13
Participant recruitment	14
Workshop content.....	16
Data collection.....	16
Transcription.....	19
CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS	21
Introduction	21
Karen ethnic identity	22
Content of the five workshops.....	23
<i>Workshop One</i>	24

<i>Workshop Two</i>	26
<i>Workshop Three</i>	28
<i>Workshop Four</i>	30
<i>Workshop Five</i>	31
The involvement of Karen culture bearers: their views on transmission	32
<i>Transmission of Karen traditional instrument playing, singing and dance</i> .	33
<i>Transmission in the refugee camps</i>	35
<i>Transmission in Australia: questions of maintenance</i>	36
<i>Deep versus surface knowledge</i>	36
<i>Karen perspectives on teachers and teaching</i>	38
<i>Hierarchy of cultural expertise and knowledge</i>	39
Karen youth perspectives and response toward transmission	40
<i>Transmission gap</i>	41
<i>Student motivation</i>	42
<i>Religious and sub-ethnic sensitivities affecting motivation among the students</i>	43
<i>Learning style: process of transmission</i>	45
<i>Gaining and consolidating personal and cultural values</i>	46
Conclusion: reflections on an unexpected outcome	47
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	49
Summary of findings	49
Recommendation for the Karen community	51
Recommendation for further research	52
Conclusion: “Where there’s a will, there’s a way”	53
REFERENCES	54
Appendix A : Ethics Approval Letter	59
Appendix B : Promotional Material	62
Appendix C: Participant Information Statement for Teacher	63
Appendix D: Participant Information Statement for Non-Professional Traditional Musician and Dancer	65
Appendix E: Participant Information Statement for The Student Participants and Parents	67
Appendix F: Participant Consent Form	69
Appendix G: Parental (or Guardian) Consent Form	71

Appendix H: Participant Consent Form for Traditional Music Teacher.....	73
Appendix I: Interview Question Outline.....	75
Appendix J: Support Letter from Karen Youth Organisation – Australia	77
Appendix K: Support Letter from Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church.....	78
Appendix L: Letter of Approval from Auburn Council for the Venue.....	79

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Student Participant Profiles.....	15
Table 2 Cultural expert and teacher participant profiles	16
Table 3 Teacher and student attendance corresponding with workshop content.....	17
Table 4 List and description of musical instruments used by Karen people of Burma as demonstrated or discussed in workshops.....	25

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 The lecture-demonstration approach of Workshop 1	24
Figure 2 Mahn Ta Kaw Wah demonstrating <i>hta</i> (song) accompanied by <i>tana</i> (harp) during Workshop 1.....	25
Figure 3 Mahn Ta Kaw Wah demonstrating <i>ta ruu</i> playing during Workshop 2 in the new venue.....	26
Figure 4 Student listening and viewing activity on the <i>don</i> dance during Workshop 2 in the new venue.....	27
Figure 5 Mahn Ta Kaw Wah teaching and modeling basic <i>don</i> dance movements, and students imitating the dance movements in Workshop 2.....	27
Figure 6 The researcher (front centre) participating in the learning process in Workshop 2.....	28
Figure 7 Teacher D demonstrating <i>don</i> dance choreography during Workshop 3	28
Figure 8 The <i>don</i> song being taught aurally during Workshop 3	29
Figure 9 Students imitating Teacher D's dance movements during Workshop 3.....	29
Figure 10 Teacher E, in Workshop 4, lecturing and demonstrating <i>tana</i> (top left); demonstrating fingering techniques (top right); and selected students explore <i>tana</i> and learn to play the basic arpeggio playing pattern (bottom left and right).....	30
Figure 11 Continuing to learn the <i>don</i> choreography in Workshop 5.....	31
Figure 12 Student K is selected to learn the introductory duet dance during Workshop 5.....	31
Figure 13 Learning the forming of geometric patterns in the <i>don</i> dance during Workshop 5.....	32

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Arriving in Australia at the age of 13 in 2000 as an asylum seeker, it was inevitable that at some stage I would undertake a journey of self-discovery, a search for the roots of my cultural identity. I was amazed to find out how little I knew about my own people, language, history, cultural heritage, and most importantly to me as I was studying music at university, my traditional music. I discovered that the traditional music of my people, a minority people of Southeast Asia, is not very accessible to its youth in the Australian diaspora. Prompted by this realisation and motivated to learn more about the cultural music of my own heritage – of the Karen people of Burma – I (hereafter the researcher) developed this study. Where a world expressive tradition is endangered, maintenance (or at least some kind of preservation) is imperative to keep that expressive repertoire intact so that future generations may draw inspiration and meaning from it.

Traditionally, Karen music learning is known to have occurred in informal settings in rurally situated villages. This study trials and evaluates the outcomes of incorporating traditional ways of music learning in a programme for young Karen students in an Australian urban setting, as a means of maintaining these musical practices in new surroundings and under different conditions. This study is vital at a personal level and significant for the Karen community in Australia more generally, which has to date not undertaken such a cultural initiative. A number of organisations have been established in Australia over the past decade to represent the Karen community and to address issues relating to Karen communal identity, which include the Karen Youth Organisation – Australia (established in 1998), the Australian Karen Organisation, and the Australian Karen Cultural Organisation. As yet, none of these organisations has systematically addressed the maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance practices.

Significance of the study

The study allows the researcher to better understand issues surrounding the preservation and maintenance of the unique and currently endangered Karen indigenous musical culture. It provides some knowledge of Karen musical practices

in the diaspora, including transmission, which have never been documented previously. Many of its participants, including the researcher, have virtually never before been exposed to Karen indigenous music and dance, with only very occasional public performances being given in Sydney in recent years, by non-professional (yet nonetheless skilled) indigenous musicians. This study offers an examination of issues that require consideration in establishing a viable community music and dance learning centre for the Karen community in Australia.

This is an important justification for the study since there is no establishment of indigenous Karen music learning in Australia in a community setting. Through participants' responses it has identified issues central to establishing means to maintain Karen music. This study allowed the younger generation of the Karen population in Sydney, Australia, to gain specific cultural music and dance knowledge, practices and repertoire. Through gaining this knowledge the researcher has investigated how it contributes to the learners' self-esteem, self-identity and cultural values as they rebuild their new lives in Australia. It is imperative to examine students' self-perception of traditional music and dance knowledge so that theoretical solutions can be derived for the alternative approach to cultural preservation.

Research Questions

The significance of the study is based on the following research questions, which form its backbone:

1. In what ways and to what extent can Karen indigenous music and dance be maintained through music learning in a non-formal context within Australia?
2. What factors need to be considered in involving elders, leaders or experts in the maintenance and transmission processes?
3. How do Karen youth respond to the teaching and learning of indigenous music and dance in this non-formal Australian context? What factors contribute to the motivation or lack of motivation of Karen youth in Australia to learn indigenous music and dance?

Through these research questions the researcher has investigated specific issues, factors and problems involved in reaching the desired outcome: the effective transmission of significant Karen music and dance knowledge to Karen youth in a diasporic context. Before proceeding however, it is important to define key terms and concepts employed throughout the thesis.

Definitions

*Karen indigenous music and dance*¹: an oral tradition deeply rooted in animist beliefs through performances of poetic songs, dance, instrumental ensemble pieces relating to religious and political content, and also dealing with death, marriage, love, day to day activities and special ceremonies (Uchida & Catlin, 1998).

Non-formal context: music teaching and learning in a community-based context led by a knowledgeable musician from within the culture.

Cultural maintenance: modes of ethnic social action employing ethnic expertise to protect and promote shared value and interests (see Liev, 2004).

Karen indigenous music and dance maintenance: Karen people living their indigenous music and dance culture, that is, learning, making, performing, and passing it on to others.

Transmission: the processes of conveying the ideas, skills and experiences of one person, group or society to another (Ranade, 2000).

Approaching the topic from several key directions, it has been necessary to review a range of literature. Specifically, the study draws on research addressing Karen people

¹ More specifically and technically, “‘Ta Thi Kli’ is the traditional Karen word for music and has been around for many years. It is included in the Saw Kau Htoo and Wade Thesaurus Volume 4 published in 1849. In spoken Karen today, many use something like ‘Ta Day Ta Oo Ta Thu Wi Tha Ser’ [playing (or plucking), blowing, and singing] but *Ta Thi Kli* is the traditional and proper term” (T. Moffatt, personal communication, 18th November 2009). The researcher’s condensed translation of the entry in Saw Kau Htoo and Wade’s Thesaurus Volume 4 for *Ta Thi Kli* is as follows: ‘to sing praise to the divine being’.

and musical culture, indigenous music transmission, refugees and the maintenance and continuation of musical traditions. A discussion of this literature follows in Chapter 2.

Karen music and dance culture*Social context*

The Karen people of Burma² originated in Mongolia approximately 2000 B.C. and their 300 year migration to Burma through the Gobi desert and along the Yellow River and Salween River is documented in oral legends and poems (Cooler, 1995; Hamilton, 1976). Karen hill tribes are classified in the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Burman language families, and were primarily agriculturalists and agrarians residing in mountain ranges (Uchida & Catlin, 1998). Karen social construction is firmly based in traditional animism – a belief in the existence of many spiritual beings – and this may also be true of its original musical culture. The introduction of Christianity during the late 19th century (Yoko, 2004) and the Karen revolution within Burma in 1948 (Rogers, 2004), have resulted in momentous changes, which have contributed to the formation of a continuously evolving modern Karen identity.

This identity as such is based on post-colonial Christian ethno-nationalism (see South, 2007). South states that such “forged” ‘Karenness’ (South, 2007, p. 58) is problematic in regard to unity among the people, since they are a diverse ethnic group with variations in language dialects, religion, and social and economic organisation. Within the plurality of the Karen people one can consult anthropological monographs devoted to various aspects of social structure and socio-religious dynamism in order to gain a broad understanding of the Karen as a people (see for example, Hamilton, 1976; Keyes, et al., 1979; Marshall, 1922 Yoko, 2007). Such studies reveal the religious, social, political and economic contexts within various subgroups and allow us to understand musical practices in each context.

The plurality of Karen music and dance culture(s) within Burma, each group with its unique traditional practices, means that there are difficulties in gaining a complete understanding of the subject. Marshall (1922) is one of only a few anthropological

² For this study, the name “Burma” is preferred over “Myanmar” for consistency with other academic works.

and socio-cultural monographs on the Karen people of Burma. While he includes very little information on musical transmission and teaching and learning, Marshall does provide information about Karen traditional musical instruments and performance contexts, providing the researcher with valuable background knowledge (see Marshall, 1922, pp.161-167). As music has a primary role in Karen daily life, poetic songs or *hta* provide religious meanings and educate the people in social norms. Songs and dances of different genres are used in various contexts such as death, marriage and social and religious ceremonies (Marshall, 1922; see also Uchida & Catlin, 1998).

Musical links to surrounding peoples

The Karen musical culture does not only exist in Burma but also in Thailand and surrounding countries. Through close examination of the three major genres of harp, mouth reed organ and the *ton* or *don* dance, Stern and Stern (1971) discovered that the Karen from Burma and the *Pwo* Karen of western Thailand shared musical features which points to origins in a single dominant tradition and society of the Southeast Asian region. Their study reveals that the music of the Karen was influenced and enriched by diverse musical practices of the region including those of the Mon, Burmese, Thai and Laos. Stern and Stern's theory is also supported by Cooler (1995) who demonstrates that musical cultures, traditions and particularly the bronze frog drum of the Karen people are shared by various ethnic tribes from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Even though there are slight variations in the types of drum among each group, it is evident that these peoples have common beliefs regarding the magical and spiritual significance of the drum.

External interest in Karen musical culture and its direction

Recently, utilising the advantages of modern technology, many interested parties (of non-ethnic Karen) engage in the preservation of endangered musical cultures through field recording and presenting the unique and rare musical materials on the Internet. *Guerrilla Ethnomusicologists* (2008)³ and *Cultural Cornerstones* (2007) are

³ On November 18, 2008, NPR radio in the United States broadcast a segment titled, "*Burmese Refugees Preserve Culture Through Music*" (Chance, 2008) which addressed the

examples of such initiatives. These aim to preserve and maintain as well as inform the current generation of world music consumers of Karen music and the Karen plight. The diverse musical excerpts uploaded to these sites allow listeners to enjoy and understand not only the musical culture but also inform them of the political struggle of the people. Featuring field recordings of songs and instrumental performances by Sein Tin Aye (a Karen cultural bearer in Mae La Refugee Camp, Thailand) and his students within the camp, the websites address the importance of maintaining and preserving the cultural heritage due to uncertainties within the refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. Similarly, the Australian Karen Youth Project in conjunction with a group of Melbourne-based traditional musicians, produced a compilation of Karen traditional songs titled *Unknown Melodies* (AKYP, 2007), as a means of preserving (by providing access to) traditional music for the younger generation of Karen in Australia and abroad. The compilation includes both traditional repertoires and new compositions in the traditional style that address the oppression of the Karen people as well as the importance of cultural maintenance and unity among the people.

Indigenous music transmission

Modes of transmission

Transmission of traditional or indigenous music, including that of the Karen, requires specific attention. With no literature on the subject of the transmission of Karen minority music, a better understanding of non-western music transmission can be gained through examining various non-western cultures for cross-cultural commonalities. Thus, Campbell (1991) describes four characteristics of traditional (non-western or western) and folk music teaching and learning: aural/oral learning (imitation), improvisation, partial or complete absence of notation and rehearsal strategies. Furthermore, oral transmission in many Asian countries is characterised by the process of “engaged” listening (Campbell, 2004, p.93) and from learning through repetition simple melodies to more complex, extended sections or even whole repertoires (Miller & Williams, 1998). Students learn to make perfect the

maintenance of Karen culture in Mae La refugee camp in Thailand. Jack Chance is the producer of the Guerilla Ethnomusicologists ‘blog’ website, documenting and webcasting endangered Karen indigenous music recordings.

kinaesthetic process of performance of traditional music with the use of mnemonic devices to recall various musical elements. They may also learn by transferring syllable systems to instruments (Campbell, 2004). Modeling by the teacher also means that the ultimate goal of a student is to imitate the teacher exactly. Oral transmission by its nature however, would result in variations across time, generation and geographical locations, as the music is not static (Keeler, 1998).

Teacher-student relationship

One recurring element of indigenous music transmission is that of the master musician-apprentice relationship as a mean of embedding music learning processes in a larger social context. In Burma, the typical musician-apprentice relationship allows learners to reside with the master for up to a period of three years while assisting the master with day-to-day household chores (Keeler, 1998). Meanwhile, the learners develop a vocabulary of oral conventions. The Thai notion of students as “pupil children” raises the teacher-pupil relationship to another level, where teachers are revered as secondary fathers or mothers (Swangviboonpong, 2003, pp.139-140). The continuous existence and maintenance of “musical houses” in Thailand, where pupils and musicians reside as a family unit, is fascinating (Swangviboonpong, 2003, p. 141). Swangviboonpong also mentions that in the past, the transmission of songs from parents to children or between relatives was done before further music learning from the master musician. Such proximity of musical transmission from parents to children can be applied to the Karen people given their cultural context. The teacher as the ultimate source of knowledge, and respect and admiration towards the teacher elevates the teacher-student relationship to where it results in a stronger family relationship.

Learners' experience and authenticity

Musical transmission has a unique and specific meaning when applied to a particular group of people in its own context. Traditional music transmission, in some cases, may be prompted by specific cultural and spiritual significance and some would regard music learning as the rite of passage to adulthood. While exploring the learning of tribal music by two contrasting groups of students (indigenous Australian learners and non-indigenous tertiary students) in its authentic context, Ellis (1985)

discovered that non-indigenous students' responses in the lessons reveal the utmost respect for the teacher. Through studying the intense and intimidating learning process her observations reveal students' submission to the rules of the teacher. Learning through endless repetition and imitation without understanding the concept, the students acknowledge a deep and effective learning process where they are transformed into a better person or are elevated to a higher plane of human existence (Ellis, 1985 pp.127-129).

While experiencing traditional music learning in Ghana, Richardson (2003) stresses the importance of authenticity in the transmission of music and modes of transmission, which include mimicry and direct physical involvement in music learning (for example, tapping the rhythm on the back of the learner as a physical mean of passing knowledge). She believes that authentic music transmission is vital in a non-contextualised setting and students need to engage in the learning experience in an authentic location.

The impact of modernisation on traditional music transmission

Due to globalisation and modernisation, traditional means of transmission have changed considerably. In rural regions, indigenous and traditional music practices such as singing about growing rice and collective farm labour (similar to African slave songs) are under threat. This is due to contemporary methods of agricultural practice replacing older practices, thus eliminating the context for music and dance-making in the rural regions (Miller & Williams, 1998). Social unrest and civil wars have significantly disrupted the lives of the people of South East Asia in the twentieth century (Rogers, 2004; Miller & Williams, 1998) and have had both direct and indirect consequences on the musical transmission. In accommodating the rising needs of modernising societies, institutionalisation of music learning has forced people to abandon traditional master-pupil models, replacing these with paid pedagogy. This clearly has implications for the essence of traditional music transmission.

Refugees and the maintenance and continuation of musical traditions

Diasporic identity and the culture of musical learning and practice

Among the world's diasporas through history, forced migration as a result of humanitarian oppression caused by war, genocide, and other political unrest of the 20th and 21st centuries requires considerable attention to understand the complexity and issues regarding refugee identity. Article 1 of the 1967 Protocol on Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees provides the definition of a refugee as:

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, 2002)

According to such a definition, the notion of the refugee is politically charged and this is evident in many diasporic communities who resettle in a host country.

As the refugee population of the world increases, Schramm (1989, 1990) proposes the notion of “transplanted” music; music whose carriers (refugees) take it to new environments from its native place (Schramm 1989, p.4). Such a notion also extends our understanding of the music of the refugees from two periodical and geographical points: “back-then” – “a past in a native environment or a place of habitual residence” and “here-and-now” – “at present in a new context” (Schramm, 1990 p. 25).

Furthermore, in some cases, refugees (especially young children and adolescents) are exposed to or experience a third cultural influence due, often, to a long transitional period and temporary location before resettling in a host country. As new refugees arrive in their host country, it is possible to see the emergence of cultural revival movements.

According to South (2007), the Karen are “an imagined” community, a society construction based on deep cultural cores and a unified nationalist vision (South, 2007, p. 57). Traditionally, there has always been reinforcement of cultural maintenance through poems, songs and legends (Uchida & Catlin, 1998). Likewise,

the recent plight of the Karen people within Burma also pushes for the preservation and maintenance of tradition and culture, which can only be taken up following resettlement.

Cultural maintenance and preservation

Maintenance and preservation is important for endangered musical cultures of the world such as that of the Karen. Under the impact of modernisation on traditional transmission and as a result of the diaspora, there are situations in which the traditional music practices have been modified or changed for greater accessibility in modern contexts. On the other hand there is also outright abandonment. Therefore Santos (1980) proposes that effective preservation of traditional music can occur through “field collection of music, laboratory work, teaching programs, information dissemination, performance and composition” (p. 62).

Learning traditional practices require an understanding of the social, cultural, religious and historical contexts in which the culture exists. Thus, younger generations in the diaspora are unable (or find it difficult) to interpret, comprehend and relate to the traditional cultural ecology and its significance (Falk, 1996). Modified teaching methods occur in the new setting in western, modern, diasporic societies, and this is due to a lack of qualified traditional teachers, repertoire fragmentation, and limited instrument availability (Grieshaber, 1994 pp. 35-39).

The attitude toward traditional music by the society can also heavily affect maintenance and preservation efforts. For example, with the development of Thai society’s perception of western influenced popular/modern music as sophisticated and of high status, authentic traditional music has become devalued (Nanongkham, 2008). A solution to this attitude is the changes and modification to the music of the Khaen in an institutionalised setting so that all members of the society may come to value it. This compromises the traditional sound of the music through the use of notation and incorporation of modern instruments into the ensemble. In the case of Karen music however, authenticity is not the primary issue, as there are no practices of traditional music transmission within Australia that would allow the younger generation to learn.

Community-based music learning

Community music learning is defined as “a group activity where people join together to actively participate in the music-making process” (Bartlett, et al., 2009, p. 21). From a refugee community music-making perspective, community music learning may be a way of meeting the social, emotional and cultural needs and challenges faced by the refugees and asylum seekers (Sebastian, 2007). While addressing the attitudes within the community regarding music learning, Sebastian (2007) and Corney (2007) discover the intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors shaping the music learning within the community group. For refugees, the involvement in community music making is generally motivated by the opportunity to maintain and develop their musical heritage, a way of solving behavioural problems, and promoting an overall sense of well-being (Sebastian, 2007). For the development and continuation of community music, it is recommended that local government councils, community music organisations, cultural organisations and musicians work in cooperation, as part of the infrastructure (Bartlett, et al., 2009).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In examining ways to preserve or maintain traditional music practices, this study draws on the qualitative paradigm. It constitutes an ethnographic case study by way of a short-term, intensive focus on how a particular cultural group might undertake transmission of its traditional music in a transplanted context. The purpose of ethnographic research is to “uncover social and cultural patterns, involving an analytic description in terms of a social setting, organisation, behaviour and activities” (Burns, 2000 p. 395).

The study also examines how Karen elders respond to an opportunity to communicate their cultural knowledge in a new context as well as how Karen youth respond to traditional music instruction and learning in this new context. The context in question is an Australian non-formal setting constructed for the study, which contrasts significantly with an authentic traditional communal music-learning environment.

Case study, as data collection (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000), allows the researcher to identify and focus on individual culture bearers, student participants, and the group learning experience, in order to understand the various perceptions of what takes place under the rubric of the transmission process. Through such inquiry, this study aims to discover how Karen traditional music can be preserved and maintained, as well as what constitutes the unique learning and teaching of Karen traditional music in a new, diasporic setting.

Research design and setting

The research design for this study combines elements of action research with ethnographic field observation as the primary approach, in order to test the viability of the transmission context devised or facilitated (Burns, 2000 p. 443). The setting for this case study was a series of two-hour indigenous music and dance workshops held over five consecutive Saturdays at Newington Community Centre in the

Western Sydney region from 4th April to 2nd May 2009. Due to transportation difficulties and some administrative miscalculation, Workshops two, three and four took place at Chester Hill at the suburban residence of one of the student participants.

Participant recruitment

Recruitment for the workshops was conducted through an information flyer posted at various Karen churches and organisations, sport and cultural gatherings, and circulated through electronic mail. Interested student participants were requested to contact the researcher through email or by telephone. Teacher recruitment was conducted in consultation with various members of the community. Selected participants (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2003) for the study comprised the esteemed traditional musician Mahn Ta Kaw Wah (a migrant refugee), 10 female and four male Karen youths and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25, who were all recent refugee migrants to Australia, as well as four other traditional musicians and dancers.

Mahn Ta Kaw Wah was chosen as the teacher for the case study due to his status as being the most qualified Karen musician living in Australia. He had previously been invited to several tertiary institutions in Germany for traditional performances and he is highly regarded by community leaders and other Karen musicians and dancers. His deep knowledge of traditional music and dance contributed to this study through his understanding of Karen music teaching and learning methods, and he also shared historical and cultural information with the participants. It must be acknowledged that his involvement in this study is of great importance to the maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance in the diaspora.

The leader/teacher participants are all referred to in the thesis as culture bearers. In order to clearly distinguish between the key teacher, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, and the various non-professional musicians and dancers who undertook guiding and teaching roles, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah is referred to throughout as the cultural expert or key teacher, while the others are referred to as teacher participants. Both the cultural expert and teacher participants are classified as culture bearers.

Karen youth participants in Sydney were drawn from various Karen organisations and churches (see Table 1). The majority of these attend either Intensive English Centres or high schools while young adults are in the process of completing English courses at TAFE (Colleges of Technical and Further Education). The Karen youth in Sydney were identified as potential participants in the study due to their lack of exposure to traditional music learning. Although minimal, some of the Karen youth participants had prior experience with and knowledge of Karen traditional music and dance and the study provided a valuable opportunity for them to both extend this and share their existing knowledge with the other participants. All student participants are Sgaw Karen Christians.

Table 1 Student Participant Profiles

No.	Student	Age	Gender	Place of Birth	Year of Arrival
1	P.H (researcher)	23	Male	Burma	2000
2	Student B	18	Male	Burma	2009
3	Student C	18	Male	Refugee camp	2008
4	Student D	17	Male	Refugee camp	2007
5	Student E	21	Female	Refugee camp	2006
6	Student F	21	Female	Refugee camp	2007
7	Student G	25	Female	Burma	2009
8	Student H	18	Female	Burma	2009
9	Student I	15	Female	Refugee camp	2007
10	Student J	19	Female	Refugee camp	2006
11	Student K	17	Female	Refugee camp	2006
12	Student L	15	Female	Refugee camp	2006
13	Student N	15	Female	Refugee camp	2008
14	Student M	14	Female	Refugee camp	2005

The teacher participants (see Table 2) were selected for inclusion in the study not only because they would contribute to the music transmission process through the workshops, but also for the purposes of investigating their past experiences as participants in communal music and dance performances in rural Burma. They participated in the workshops for assisting the key teacher, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, with instrumental and dance demonstrations as well as group teaching. These teacher participants contributed to a better understanding of how Karen communal musical practices in rural parts of Burma or in the refugee camps are still maintained. Their accounts provided data necessary for the documentation of such practices in the

study, therefore contributing partly to the body of literature on Karen indigenous music and dance practices and traditional teaching methods.

Table 2 Cultural expert and teacher participant profiles

Teacher	Profile description
Mahn Ta Kaw Wah	male, <i>Pwo</i> Karen, Buddhist, in mid-50s, arrived in Australia in 1996, singer/dancer/multi-instrumentalist, attended and taught first 3 of 5 sessions. Co-founder of Australia Karen Cultural Organisation
Teacher B	male, <i>Pwo</i> Karen, Buddhist/Christian, mid 30s, arrived in Australia in 2005, percussionist, attended all sessions.
Teacher C	male, <i>Pwo</i> Karen, Buddhist, mid 20s, arrived in Australia in 2008, dancer & percussionist, attended all sessions.
Teacher D	female, <i>Pwo</i> Karen, Buddhist, mid 20s, arrived in Australia in 2008, singer & dancer, attended 3 rd , 4 th , and 5 th sessions.
Teacher E	male, <i>Sgaw</i> Karen, Christian, mid 20s, arrived in Australia in 2005, singer and harpist, attended only the 4 th session.

Workshop content

The workshop content was informally programmed over many months, through close consultation with Mahn Ta Kaw Wah and some of the other teacher participants. The content of the workshops (see **Table 3**) consisted primarily of learning the basic traditional *don* dance movements and a *don* dance repertoire item, a lecture providing historical and cultural information, demonstrations of a range of musical instruments, and learning a vocal repertoire item to accompany the *don* dance.

Data collection

As an ethnographic case study, the researcher was a participant observer who took field notes from the workshops and conducted semi-structured interviews (Angrosino, 2007; Burns, 2000; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Creswell, 2007,

Table 3 Teacher and student attendance corresponding with workshop content

Sessions	Leader/s	Partici- pants	Content
1	Mahn Ta Kaw Wah / Teacher B	12 (M-3, F-9)	Lecture and musical instrument demonstration
2	Mahn Ta Kaw Wah (Teacher B and C)*	13 (M-3, F-10)	Basic <i>don</i> dance movements and steps; 'engaged' listening activity (audio visual material brought to the session by Teacher C)
3	Mahn Ta Kaw Wah / Teacher D (Teacher B and C)*	13 (M-4, F-9)	Learning <i>don</i> song; basic <i>don</i> dance movements; <i>don</i> dance choreography
4	Teacher E / Teacher D (Teacher B and C)*	14 (M-4, F-10)	Demonstration of <i>hta</i> (poetic song) and <i>tana</i> (harp) playing; continuing to learn <i>don</i> dance choreography
5	Teacher D (Teacher B and C)*	14 (M-4, F-10)	Final rehearsal of <i>don</i> dance choreography with song

*In this session Teachers B and C took the role of accompaniment musicians for the dance rather than participating in the teaching.

Delamont,1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wiersma, 2000) with the participants to collect the data. A participant-as-observer (Burns, 2000) and also a performance participant in the workshops, the researcher was able to collect and generate data through visual and audio recordings and field notes. He was able to gain an understanding from the perspective of the individuals involved in the study by undertaking a learning experience identical to that of these other participant learners (Burns, 2000; Wiersma, 2000). This is due to the researcher's background as an Australian Karen young person himself and as one who had virtually no prior exposure to Karen indigenous music and dance before beginning the lengthy process of planning and implementing the study.⁴

⁴ For another University course subject undertaken while this study was underway, the researcher collected and analysed data from Karen music performances and an interview with Teacher E.

The observational foci were on the general context of setting, traditional music transmission, student participation in the workshop to gain cultural and traditional musical knowledge, and the social behaviour and characteristics of the participants. Field notes taken during the five workshops provided an understanding of the interaction between the teachers, the teachers and the learners, the learners' attitude toward the learning process, and the learners' participation in the workshops, as well as issues arising from the workshops and the study more generally.

Interviewing was integral to the study due to its strength as a means of collecting rich personal data, and since it is "an interchange of view between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, through seeing the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasising the social situatedness of research data" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000 p. 267). The researcher employed semi-structured interviews because this approach is flexible in nature, permitting the direction of the interview to be influenced by the respondent's thoughts, opinion and suggestions (Burns, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews (individual and group) (Burns, 2000) were conducted during the weeks following the completion of the five workshops. Four culture bearers were interviewed: the cultural expert – Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, Teacher B, Teacher D and Teacher E. The researcher interviewed the cultural expert in order to understand his self-perception as the key teacher in the study, his evaluation of both the teaching and the learning experience of the student participants, and his approach to teaching. Importantly, during this interview the key teacher was asked for his opinion on the transmission of Karen indigenous music in Australia and for suggestions as to how to promote such a process. It was also important that his knowledge of the historical, cultural and musical background of the Karen people was recorded and documented.

Teacher participants were also interviewed to investigate their past experiences as learners in indigenous music and dance transmission in Burma. Providing information on how the music and dance was transmitted to them, the responses highlighted the teaching and learning methods in rural areas in Burma, which have never before been documented. Likewise, student participants were interviewed as a

focus group to examine not only their attitudes and responses to the learning of indigenous music and dance, but also factors contributing to their motivation or lack of motivation in learning indigenous music and dance.

Each interview lasted around one hour for the culture bearers and two hours for the student participant group interview. Two students who were unavailable for the group interview were interviewed separately. All interviews were conducted in the Karen language for convenience due to English being a barrier for some recent migrants. After transcribing the interviews, for validity and reliability all collected data were presented to the respondents to check for clarification, inconsistencies, and biased interpretation. Audio recording was used as a primary tool for interviews and video recording for the workshops since video documentation allowed the researcher to review the physical learning processes that took place.

Transcription

As noted, all data collected from interviews were transcribed for review and data analysis purposes (Angrosino, 2007). Transcription in this study is vitally important due to the involvement of a language other than English – all the data collected were in the Karen language. Transcription involved translating directly into English from the recorded interview data. As a fluent native *Sgaw* Karen speaker, the researcher was aware of the different expressions of the languages involved (English, *Sgaw* Karen, and occasionally, Burmese), therefore was able to produce a culturally informed data transcription. All transcribed data were dated and categorised in chronological order for easy access in the analysis process.

Data Analysis

All data collected were analysed according to the case study's context, its location and form of data collection methods focusing on individuals and groups (Burns, 2000). Analysis was undertaken primarily through coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 61) state that coding is “an operation by which data are broken down, conceptualised and resulting in emerging themes from transcribed data”. Such manipulation of data was useful in this study as it identified complex issues, concepts

and factors contributing to the understanding of transmission and maintenance of the Karen indigenous music and dance in Burma, the refugee camps, and in Australia.

Through open coding, the researcher was able to identify significant categories, from observation of the five workshops and involvement of cultural bearers in the transmission and maintenance process, the kinds of student-teacher relationship observed, and student participants' responses to the project, thereby formulating themes, issues, concepts and topics. This analysis helped to identify relationships between categories through specific examining of the behavioural actions of the participants, conditions affecting attitude or motivation and the consequence of significant traditional music and dance learning as a result of participation in the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The analysis provided invaluable insight learning toward an understanding of answers to the research questions posed in the Chapter One.

To ensure validity and reliability of the research study, the researcher employed triangulation, where data from two or more methods of collection were examined and compared from more than one point of view. Both within and between method triangulation was employed to examine the interview responses of culture bearers and student participants in the light of the field notes and observation of the video recordings of the workshops (Delamont, 1992).

As the researcher is also a member of the Karen community in Sydney, there was alertness to understanding and gaining cultural insider knowledge throughout the study. While in some respects problematical, insider knowledge has considerable impact on the analysis process as awareness of cultural insights allows the researcher to access certain information an outsider would not likely be able to obtain. On the contrary, there is also the possibility that the researcher may dismiss certain phenomena due to familiarity with the subject.

The above discussion of methodology and data collection methods as well as analysis formed the framework of the findings and as a result the study revealed an emerging complex as well as unexpected themes and issues.

Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the study's findings regarding the maintenance of Karen indigenous musical culture in Australia. As stated in Chapter 1, for the purposes of this study, Karen indigenous music and dance maintenance is defined as Karen people *living* their indigenous music and dance culture, that is, learning, making, performing, and passing it on to others.

The research data were collected by three means: in the form of field notes made by the researcher to document the series of five workshops; through the processes of participant observation and performance participation (see **Figure 6** below); video documentation of the five workshops⁵; and through interviews with participants, both those instructing and those learning. Since the researcher is a cultural 'insider' this provided valuable insights at all stages of the project, including interpreting the interview responses, which were not always direct or explicit.

To place the research findings in perspective, the chapter begins with a brief consideration of a key issue, that of Karen ethnic identity in the diaspora. The importance of this issue emerged during the months leading up to the workshop sessions, and continued to be significant throughout the entire project. An awareness of the complexity of this issue is necessary to interpreting the research findings as well as understanding their implications. Next is a description and analysis of the content of each of the five workshops (that is, what actually took place). An analytical discussion follows, of issues surrounding the involvement of experts in Karen musical culture in these workshops where issues of maintenance and transmission are highlighted. Finally, a survey and analysis of the responses of Karen youth to the workshops is undertaken and reflection on an expected outcome of this

⁵ All photographs in Chapter 4 are stills from the researcher's video documentation footage of the workshops.

research into learning Karen indigenous music and dance in an Australian non-formal context is presented as a conclusion to the chapter.

Karen ethnic identity

The first issue that must be considered is the specific implications for this study of the complex political nature of contemporary Karen ethnic identity, the sectarianism of which survives in the diaspora. As South (2007; 2008 pp.13-18) has explained, the construction of Karen identity is based on a “forged”, “elitist”, “imagined”, “Christian”, “*Sgaw*” Karen nationalist ideology as a result of over 50 years of oppression from the Burmese government. Therefore the plurality of the Karen ethnic sub-groups possessing different language, religion, culture, customs and even political agendas, raises the problem of representing the Karen people with a mono-ethnic identity. Perhaps due to the sensitivity of the issue, scholars including South do not explicitly mention the segregation between the *Sgaw* and *Pwo* Karen.

According to Karen oral history there was once a family of four sons and three daughters. As a result of a family feud, the mother and daughters separated from the father and the sons. Thus the legend marks the beginning of a division between, at the most general level, *Pwo* Karen (*Moe Hti* – mother Karen) and *Sgaw* Karen (*Pah Hti* – father Karen). Interestingly, this story emerged in the first workshop, being told by Mahn Ta Kaw Wah as a means of recalling and transmitting Karen oral history.

Throughout history the segregation between the two groups is prominently reflected through Christian and Buddhist separation amongst the *Sgaw* and *Pwo* Karen respectively.⁶ In recent years, the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council, the Burmese military dictatorship) has successfully used this religious and interethnic segregation as a tactic, resulting in the division of KNU (the Karen National Union, formed in 1949 by members, the majority of whom are from elite Christian *Sgaw* Karen) and the DKBA (Democratic Kayin Buddhist Organisation Army) (see South 2007; South 2008). Furthermore, with the consolidation of this identity through Christian missionaries and networks, it is speculated that Christians in the refugee

⁶ See Worland (2009) for a detailed discussion of Karen Christian identity.

camps along the Thai-Burma border tend to receive special consideration in comparison to the rest of the Karen refugees.

In relation to the study, problems and issues emerging from the allegedly forged Karen ethnic identity have a considerable impact on the diasporic Karen people, who have migrated to the third country such as Australia (first being Burma, second being the refugee camps within Thailand). With the increased realization for the importance of cultural maintenance in the third countries, Karen people (the majority of whom are *Sgaw*) in the final stage of the diaspora tend to continually reinforce and consolidate this ethnic identity within the community. At the same time, there is a push for unity among the Karen people, disregarding differences in ethnicity and religion yet proving to have strong political views regarding the alliance of SPDC and DKBA.

As can be seen, this study took place within in the complex context of Karen ethnic identity in the diaspora, where certain religious, political and interethnic issues emerged throughout the study. The content of each of the five workshops is now discussed and some of these issues can be understood more immediately by considering what took place during the workshops, particularly regarding the learning of repertoire items. Differences in Karen languages were highlighted, as well as in language scripts (*Pwo* and *Sgaw* languages use contrasting scripts), and a *Pwo*-specific dance was taught to the participants, who were all *Sgaw* Karen (as is the researcher). The key culture bearer (Manh Ta Kaw Wah who is Teacher A) and Teachers B, C, and D are all *Pwo* Karen while Teacher E is *Sgaw* Karen.

Content of the five workshops

As described in Chapter 3, this research is based on a series of five workshops designed by the researcher and conducted in partnership with members of the Karen community in Sydney, in order to investigate the viability of Karen indigenous musical maintenance. The five two-hour workshops were conducted over five Saturdays during April and May of 2009. Leading up to the workshops, it was necessary to consult with the key Karen cultural expert in Sydney, as well as teacher-assistants, student participants and the local government council who provided the venue.

The five workshops (see Chapter 3) were designed to explore the ways and extent to which Karen traditional music can be maintained in Australia, specifically in Western Sydney. Prior to the project, planning, organising and facilitating the workshops proved to be one of the most challenging parts of this research project. It was particularly demanding to organise a suitable time available for the cultural bearer, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, as he is committed to the responsibilities of being a founder and president of the Australian Karen Cultural Organisation. Other challenges include the venue, transportation and the limitation of the time itself. The workshops were held at the Newington Community Centre for the first and last sessions and three middle sessions were held at one of the participants' residence due to transportation inconvenience and at a central location for all participants.

Workshop One

The first workshop was held at the conference room of the Newington Community Centre, Sydney. Twelve student participants and four teachers attended. Mahn Ta Kaw Wah commenced the workshop with a lecture on the importance of Karen cultural maintenance then discussed the historical and cultural background of Karen music (this is not a traditional approach to transmission) (see photograph in **Figure 1**). Next he introduced Karen traditional instruments and demonstrated their playing techniques (instruments demonstrated or discussed in the workshop are listed in **Table 4**) (see photograph in **Figure 2**). Teacher B assisted Mahn Ta Kaw Wah by occasionally contributing details.



Figure 1 The lecture-demonstration approach of Workshop 1

Table 4 List and description of musical instruments used by Karen people of Burma as demonstrated or discussed in workshops

Instrument	Description
<i>klo</i>	The Karen bronze drum approximately 60 cm in diameter and 40-60 cm in depth.
<i>tana</i>	A six stringed Karen harp made from one piece of <i>klaw klay</i> (Pterocarpus Indicus) wood, desired for its texture, scent and colour.
<i>pi bhar</i>	Mouth reed organ which can be seen across South East Asia.
<i>puun dwar</i>	A bamboo flute, blown from a single hole in the middle and pitch controlled by the use of two thumbs from both ends.
<i>ta</i>	Karen long drum similar to the African goblet-shaped drum.
<i>ta pu</i>	The common membranophone.
<i>ka la tae</i> (Burmese)	A wood or bamboo block to keep the time.
Mandolin	A western instrument introduced in the 20 th century for entertainment purposes with playing style adapted to Karen folk playing.
<i>ta ruu</i>	An end blown bamboo flute.
<i>na dhi</i>	A four stringed instrument that can be played by plucking the strings (similar to mandolin playing).
<i>kweh</i>	A buffalo horn used in various occasions including battles to give out signal to the people.



Figure 2 Mahn Ta Kaw Wah demonstrating *hta* (song) accompanied by *tana* (harp) during Workshop 1

The workshop consisted of rich cultural information on the various instruments and the contexts in which they are played. With Mahn Ta Kaw Wah's continuous insistence of 'only touching the basics', the workshop provided theoretical information laying the foundation and motivation for the student participants to learn more about Karen music. Some students continuously asked questions throughout the

workshop and were heavily involved in discussions. The lecture approach appeared to be taken for several reasons, including perceptions by Mahn Ta Kaw Wah of the limited time, resource limitations, and the actual Australian setting, which, while it was non-formal in intent, was more formal than Karen participants might have expected.

Workshop Two

This workshop was delayed and relocated to a student participant's residence in Chester Hill, which caused it to be shortened by half an hour. It was held under two large temporarily erected marquees in the backyard with 25 chairs set up for the session. It was convenient for all the participants (including the teachers) as the house is centrally located. It was interesting to see how students were more productive, engaged and comfortable in this setting compared with Newington Community Centre venue (see the photograph in **Figure 3**).

The content of this workshop was unknown to the researcher (since it was decided upon by the teachers) until the morning of the workshop and this was a challenging and frustrating aspect of the study. Initially, it was thought that musical activities and vocal repertoire suitable for student participants would be included; however this was not the case. The workshop commenced with revision and a continuation of the instrumental demonstrations of the *kwe* (buffalo horn) and *ta ruu* (end-blown flute) (see **Figure 3**), followed by a listening and viewing activity of the *don* dance on a film clip where students were able to observe and discuss the dance (see **Figure 4**).



Figure 3 Mahn Ta Kaw Wah demonstrating *ta ruu* playing during Workshop 2 in the new venue



Figure 4 Student listening and viewing activity on the *don* dance during Workshop 2 in the new venue

The primary content of the workshop was the teaching and learning of basic *don* dance movements, which form the foundation of the dance genre. Starting with easy footsteps on constant four beats, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah gradually taught the students to include hand and body movements (see **Figure 5**). The dance teaching was repetitive and cumulative with, primarily, modeling, verbal explanation and correcting of students' posture (see **Figure 6**). As a result, the students' learning style was imitative and repetitive with little individual feedback from the teacher. The basic dance movements were accompanied by *ta pu* (normal drum), brass high hats (un-named, but similar to Balinese *ceng ceng*), and *ka la tae* (the Burmese name for the timing wood or bamboo block).



Figure 5 Mahn Ta Kaw Wah teaching and modeling basic *don* dance movements, and students imitating the dance movements in Workshop 2



Figure 6 The researcher (front centre) participating in the learning process in Workshop 2

Workshop Three

The third workshop was also held at the Chester Hill residence with an additional male student joining the other participants, bringing the total to 13 (one female student was absent on this day). The session commenced with the arrival of a new female teacher assistant (Teacher D) who introduced the *don* dance choreography (**Figure 7**). As Mahn Ta Kaw Wah's arrival was delayed, Teacher D taught the students the *don* song, in *Pwo* Karen, to accompany the *don* choreography. The song was taught aurally (**Figure 8**) with the aid of the written words in *Sgaw* Karen script as the students cannot read or pronounce *Pwo* Karen. The song has four verses with varied text and melody – each verse was repeated.



Figure 7 Teacher D demonstrating *don* dance choreography during Workshop 3



Figure 8 The *don* song being taught aurally during Workshop 3

Once the song was taught, Teacher D introduced the dance choreography through continuous modeling (**Figure 9**). As she did not explain or describe any dance movement, it was interesting to see the students imitating the dance movements through trial and error throughout the session. Some of the female students had learnt this choreography prior to the workshops and they quickly recalled the dance.

Mahn Ta Kaw Wah arrived at around the halfway point and led the rest of the workshop session. The researcher perceived some tension at this point over leadership.



Figure 9 Students imitating Teacher D's dance movements during Workshop 3

Workshop Four

This week's workshop was also held at Chester Hill as the teacher participants could not get to Newington Community Centre. Mahn Ta Kaw Wah had not communicated that he would not attend and as a result, at the last minute the researcher had to ask Teacher E to lead the first half hour. Teacher E introduced the *tana* (the Sgaw Karen version) with a discussion of the strings and the basic tuning system, and demonstrated the playing techniques (see **Figure 10**). Teacher E then continued the demonstration of *tana* by lament singing several *htas* and discussing their significance in Karen musical culture (**Figure 10**). At the conclusion of the demonstration, selected students explored the typical arpeggio pattern of *tana* playing with Teacher E correcting their fingerings on the strings and plucking technique (**Figure 10**). The remainder of the workshop was devoted to a rehearsal of the *don* choreography led by Teacher D.



Figure 10 Teacher E, in Workshop 4, lecturing and demonstrating *tana* (top left); demonstrating fingering techniques (top right); and selected students explore *tana* and learn to play the basic arpeggio playing pattern (bottom left and right)

Workshop Five

The concluding workshop was held at Newington Community Centre and as a group there was no teaching or learning but continuing on the *don* choreography (**Figure 11**). One interesting development was selecting and teaching Student K the introductory duet dance for the group dance (**Figure 12**). According to the teacher,



Figure 11 Continuing to learn the *don* choreography in Workshop 5



Figure 12 Student K is selected to learn the introductory duet dance during Workshop 5

Student K was selected due to her excellent progress during previous workshops. The introductory dance consists of two participants dancing in unison and singing to a slow song as they convey best wishes to the audience. Teacher D then continued to teach the forming of geometric patterns according to the song verses (**Figure 13**).



Figure 13 Learning the forming of geometric patterns in the *don* dance during Workshop 5

It can be seen from this summary of the content and approaches employed in each workshop that there was no unified approach to transmission. Indeed, the researcher found it very difficult to establish with the cultural expert, either beforehand or week to week, what should and would comprise the content of the workshops. I will now discuss the views of the participating Karen culture bearers as they emerged in the interviews and through field observation, in order to determine the significance to the study of understandings of transmission.

The involvement of Karen culture bearers: their views on transmission

There were differing perceptions among workshop leaders and participants regarding the meaning or meanings of teaching and learning. Further, the study raised complex contextual pedagogical and social issues involving Karen elders, community leaders and/or cultural experts in the maintenance and transmission processes of Karen traditional music. Here, with the benefit of the researcher's insider knowledge of the Karen community, the study reveals the ways in which political, ethnic and religious issues inform the practice of Karen traditional music and dance. In addition there are historical perspectives that inform Karen identity within the diaspora, and together, all of these issues had a considerable impact on attempts to devise a transmission context and process for this study. From the study the extent to which there were contrasting (and sometimes conflicting) approaches to maintenance and preservation of Karen traditional music and dance became apparent. To begin, I focus on teachers' views on maintenance and transmission of their indigenous music.

Transmission of Karen traditional instrument playing, singing and dance

Transmission is generally considered to be the process of teaching and learning through passing knowledge from one generation to the next. In the case of Karen people, transmission has multiple modes, depending on where, when and from whom music and dance is acquired. It is therefore necessary to examine how the teachers of these workshops understand transmission and how their own learning experiences shaped their perception of teaching, learning, living, practising and transmitting indigenous music and dance.

Traditionally, transmission occurred from generation to generation often through immediate family members such as grandparents and parents. Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, who is skilled in playing multiple instruments and *don* dancing, is considered to be the key Karen cultural expert in Sydney. He has been involved in coordinating numerous Karen cultural events inside Burma at both the national level and at a refugee camp. During the interview, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah described his pursuit of music and dance transmission as a child:

I came to involve in it (music and dance) when I was young, with my grandparents who practised *don* and performed other cultural practices. I used to help them and I had some interest in it. I wanted to learn our cultural practices, and I learnt them from my grandparents at various stages from childhood.

Transmission by way of family members meant that music and dance practices were part of daily living. Teacher E recounted his learning as a child:

When I started (learning), I was in Burma and my father taught me, people from the previous generation, they sang *hta* and played *tana* and I was highly motivated to learn from my father.... my parents were farmers and when they finished for the day, they would teach me *hta* and *tana*. They would model at first then I would follow (imitate) them.

It is also the case that the learner follows and searches for the knowledge through observation, inquiry, and simply developing his or her own musical skills by 'doing it' rather than 'learning it'. This approach is fuelled by self-motivation, interest and passion, throughout the learner's entire life.

While the learning was primarily from family members, transmission also occurred outside the family circle. Mahn Ta Kaw Wah described how he came to learn indigenous music from others apart from his grandparents:

When I was young, I saw people sing, play *tana* or other instruments; I was very interested and wanted to do whatever they were doing. I wanted to sing along so I searched and learnt throughout my life, how to make instruments; I listened and watched how to play instruments. As for myself, I had to practise regularly.

It was apparent in Mahn Ta Kaw Wah's approach in the workshops that there was a sense of an unspoken teaching and learning process, as in many world cultures. Unlike the Western philosophy of pedagogy, the Karen perception of transmission is a form of subconscious passing on of tradition and knowledge in each generation, which is impossible to sustain due to modernisation. The transmission processes of the indigenous music and dance changed considerably during the 20th century.

One other finding is the various communal transmission modes appropriate to each genre. The *don* dance, for example, was and still is a communal practice for the *Pwo* Karen. Often taking place at the large clearing of the village head's residence or in the compound of the Buddhist monastery, 20 to 30 of the village youth would gather to participate in this rehearsal. As a young adolescent male, Teacher D described the event taken place at the residence of his village youth leader:

We would hear the signal of the coconut shell from the youth leader's house and we immediately would get ready to be there for fear of being late. Every time we made mistakes, he or the teacher would cane us but it was for the good of our dancing.

In contrast, in the hill region in Burma where *Sgaw* Karen reside the communal *hta* singing and *tana* playing follows a quieter approach. With up to six or seven participants, Teacher E's family would welcome neighbours to communally chant and lament *htas*, accompanied by either a single or multiple *tanans* (up to two or three depending on their availability). This was an ideal self-learning context providing an environment of listening, absorbing, mimicking, participating, and enjoying the *htas* and this is embedded within the heart of the young Teacher E.

These descriptions indicate varied Karen practices of music and dance transmission, being determined by such factors as sub-ethnicity (*Pwo* and *Sgaw*), geographical location, and religious background.

Transmission in the refugee camps

The influx of Karen from Burma into the refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border from the late 1940s began a new chapter in Karen indigenous music and dance transmission. The motive for transmission is now strongly influenced by a desire to maintain and preserve, and understandably the refugees feel an intensification of the awareness of Karen identity.

While many *Pwo* Buddhist Karen and *Sgaw* Christian Karen refugees led separate lives within the camps, it appears that it was the *Pwo* Karen culture bearers who continued to maintain the ‘*Pwo*’ Karen cultural practices including ‘*Pwo*-specific’ music and dance genres. This observation is justified by the rich and diverse genres of *Pwo* Karen music and dance circulating in Karen communities, compared to a less-promoted (and stagnant) *Sgaw* Karen culture.

Under the influence of Christianity from the late 19th century, *Sgaw* Karen indigenous music and dance practices were replaced by the more admired Western hymns, translated into the *Sgaw* Karen language. Where they were not linked to traditional religious beliefs and practices, some *Sgaw* music and dance practices survived – several bamboo dance genres, religious *htas* (often containing metaphoric references to Biblical imagery such as the Creation or the birth of Christ), secular *htas* and *tana* playing. Nonetheless, traditional practices are preserved despite ethnic cultural divisions.

Within the refugee camps, the Karen wrist tying ceremony (where one’s wandering spirit is called to return to the physical body) is considered by the *Pwo* Karen, who conduct it, to embody the essence of Karen cultural identity. The wrist tying ceremony is not only a ritual of calling back spirits but also a context where

maintenance and preservation of many music, dance and other traditional practices such as courtship and other art forms are celebrated, through competitions and performances (see Anonymous, 2007). With the main elements of feasting on sticky rice (the unity of grains being symbolic of Karen communality) and all participants wearing white needle threads on their wrists, the occasion promotes and symbolises unity among the Karen people (both *Pwo* and *Sgaw*). Ironically, while the intention of the celebration is to strengthen unity, its ritualistic aspects often create religious concerns for some Karen who decline to be involved.

Transmission in Australia: questions of maintenance

Within the framework of this study, transmission in the final stage of the diaspora (that is, in a 'third' country such as Australia) is influenced by many factors. Since the beginning of Karen refugee resettlement in Australia, there has been no attempt to establish ongoing community music and dance learning as a means of cultural maintenance and preservation. Therefore, this study constitutes a new initiative developed without the benefit of prior knowledge of what it might entail. For one year prior to the project, there had been several meetings with the cultural expert, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, discussing maintenance and preservation of culture and how to approach the project. The meetings revealed that to some extent there existed religious, social and political differences within the Karen community in Sydney.

Deep versus surface knowledge

Through insider knowledge and observation from the meetings prior to the project, the researcher sensed unexpressed hesitation regarding the commitment of the cultural experts. It may have been particularly difficult for Mahn Ta Kaw Wah to approach the project (a university Honours degree project) in considering various teaching methods (traditional as well as modern) and appropriate materials suitable for the given time frame. Reiterating the phrase, 'only touching the basics', Mahn Ta Kaw Wah promised to deliver an 'introduction' to Karen cultural music and dance practices. This raises an interesting consideration regarding the issue of deep versus surface knowledge. Due to time limitations in the Australian transmission context, the learning of essential cultural knowledge can be jeopardised and this complicates

the transmission process and its authenticity. As deep cultural knowledge could not be easily transmitted within this research project (which was a new initiative in the Karen community), questions regarding the interest and motivation of the student participants also have been of concern to Mahn Ta Kaw Wah.

Further, lack of mutual trust due to lack of a close relationship between the cultural expert and the student participants may have also led to his hesitation (as perceived by the researcher). Aware of his own reputation for strictness from *don* dance practices he had led and taught in the past, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah may have approached this new group of students with some hesitation, wondering about the level of their commitment and dedication. Although he succeeded in producing *don* dancers of a high standard, he may not have necessarily felt appreciated by the learners and this resulted in a sense of distance between him and students in general, in the community. Without previous understanding or knowledge of the intensity of various processes of transmission, he may have anticipated that students would be quite unprepared for the difficult and challenging experience ahead, of learning the *don* dance.

One important issue raised by Mahn Ta Kaw Wah is the voluntary nature of the current project. Since students participated voluntarily in the workshops this meant that their commitment was sometimes in question. This had an effect on the teacher-student relationship. Mahn Ta Kaw Wah expressed his concern:

If we want to do it properly, we need time, commitment, venue, and funding proposals. At the moment, we are doing volunteer work. So if people are free then they come but if not, they don't come. If they have the willingness then they would and if they don't then they don't come. Our cultural standard is only this much, only at volunteer level and we are not professionals.

This issue also affected the self-image of the teacher, where they felt that as a source of knowledge they are sometimes taken for granted, particularly in the new transmission setting. This in turn conveys the idea that over time, students may no longer pay respect to the teachers and devalue their culture bearers.

It emerged from the study that the commitment of the cultural expert could also be shaped by political, religious and interethnic sensitivities. Politically charged community organisations and groups mean there are complex issues mediating the relationships among the members of such communities, and the Karen community is no exception. Issues based on inter-ethnicity (*Sgaw* and *Pwo*) and religious allegiance (Christian and Buddhist) can intensify a sense of ‘the other’. Mahn Ta Kaw Wah may have had to personally consider, for example, whether his involvement in teaching indigenous music and dance to Christian students would jeopardise his position within the Karen community.

Karen perspectives on teachers and teaching

As discussed, modes of transmission in Karen music and dance culture include ‘unspoken’ teaching and learning through immediate family members. Examining the teaching and learning processes employed in the workshops as well as background understanding of the music and dance learning previously experienced by the teachers, one can attempt to generate a philosophical understanding of a Karen pedagogical model employed within the Australian non-formal context. The teachers’ perception of teaching and learning is interesting since regarding his involvement in this study, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah described himself not as a teacher or professional cultural expert, but as a family member who led, displayed and modeled music and dance practices, motivated out of compassion:

For these workshops, I did this not as a teacher or an expert, rather as a brother, a sister, an uncle or an aunty [toward the students]. My desire was for the youngsters to appreciate and that they learn to do it properly – on the grounds of love alone ... I only showed them how to do it.

Here, an interesting concept of teaching emerges and according to this modest statement, teaching can be considered as a compassionate ‘showing’, leading the way, displaying and modeling. In contrast, however, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah’s reactions to the teaching of others appeared to contradict this statement. When asked to comment on the group teaching and the teaching of Teacher D with the *don* choreography, he was dismissive, stating that it did not constitute teaching:

Yes, we can have one or two teachers; each teaching and teacher is different. As for me I teach the basic foundation of *don* for the students to understand

the basic timing and movement. [Teacher D's] way to teaching is not teaching; she is merely modeling the dance and not teaching. She didn't show the techniques. Teaching requires step-by-step development and student have to execute each level to improve to the next. Techniques include how to move the hands, legs, hips, etc.

This comment reveals the complicated nature of contemporary transmission especially in the diasporic community. It presents a dilemma – conflicting ideals between the Karen traditional philosophy of ‘showing’ and a contemporary Western-informed idea of pedagogy. The other teacher participants, especially Teacher E, communicated a relaxed though nonetheless effective approach to sharing their cultural knowledge and musical and dance skills to the students. Perhaps this is dictated by the age gap between the cultural expert and the other teacher participants, or perhaps it is related to his self-perception of his status in the diasporic community.

Hierarchy of cultural expertise and knowledge

While Mahn Ta Kaw Wah conveys a modest perception of himself as a teacher, the other teacher participants' show deference towards him as the key Karen cultural expert, the most highly qualified culture bearer in the Karen community in Australia. He is respected and consulted at all levels and this deference was noticeable during the workshops. One other thing to consider is that he is also the founder and leader of the Australian Karen Cultural Organisation and apart from Teacher E, all other teacher participants are members and co-volunteer workers of the organisation. Therefore a sense of ‘leadership and followers’ was already in existence.

From the observations, the teaching appeared to be group led. Each teacher took responsibility for the different aspect of the workshops: Mahn Ta Kaw Wah taught basic *don* dance movements with Teachers B and C assisting, correcting and accompanying. Teacher D *modeled don* choreography. This can be seen in the following excerpt from the researcher's field notes Workshop 3:

When I returned to the workshop, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah had already arrived and when I distributed the lyrics to the girls, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah suggested that we should commence with the dance movements. Also he insisted that if we learn the song, we will not have enough time. Therefore, he asked everyone to stop learning the song and started to show some more dance

steps. I realised that once Ta Kaw Wah took the teacher role, Teacher 4 automatically sat down and stopped participating straight away. It seems as though she submitted to Mahn Ta Kaw Wah's authority. In contrast, the students however did not show any sign of submission and they all (apart from the boys) had fun learning.

Then suddenly, Teacher 4 joined in with the students. Even though she is a competent dancer, she still considers herself as a learner in the presence of Ta Kaw Wah. Ta Kaw Wah prompted the revision of the previous basic dance movements from last week. Now the dialogue (in *Pwo* Karen) between him and Teacher 4 is more obvious and it seems that he has asked Teacher 4 to gradually take over the teaching.

This observation also reveals the order in which selected materials are taught and controlled (for the first three workshops) by Mahn Ta Kaw Wah. The importance of knowing the basic *don* movements became apparent and learning the song was no longer vital.

Previous visits to *don* dance rehearsals by members of the Australian Karen Cultural Organisation revealed to the researcher that the song was taught before the dance. In this workshop however, it seems that Mahn Ta Kaw Wah wanted the students to learn and master the basic dance movements first before teaching the *don* choreography. It was understood that teaching the song before completely learning the basic dance movements may have been a variation in his usual plan or sequence of teaching. Upon reflection, teaching the *don* choreography was not part of the initial plan nor was the *hta* demonstration session with Teacher E. These became part of the workshop content as plans had to be changed spontaneously throughout the course of the study.

Karen youth perspectives and response toward transmission

Focusing on the student participants' responses to the workshops, it is interesting to examine students' perception of the learning styles, processes of transmission within the workshops, learnt materials and the efficiency and success of the workshops. Factors relating to the student participants' motivation or lack of motivation to learn their indigenous music, and the emergence of a nascent contemporary Karen identity

among the Karen youth in Australia, as a result of the diaspora, are also analysed and discussed.

Transmission gap

Group interview responses regarding students' previous indigenous music and dance experiences revealed a sense of interruption or a gap in the transmission processes between generations. It is evident that there is a lack of traditional family or communal music and dance transmission among the Karen youth resettled in the third country, leading to this gap:

Student N: When I was living in the camp, our teacher (male) taught us to maintain our Karen cultural traditions/heritage; when we walked around on the road, some elders told us about the old sayings and legends which has been passed down generation to generation. At home our parents told us not to forget about our sayings and to maintain it.

P: What kind of sayings did they tell you?

Student N: They said about how we used to have Karen courts, and how our Karen people have been suppressed until now.

P: Did they tell you about singing and music?

Student N: I have only seen how other people sing *hta* and play *tana*.

P: What about your grandparents? Did they practise any cultural music or dance?

Student M: I have never heard my grandmother singing *hta*, but I have heard only from my grandfather (from my dad's side). He was a hill dweller.

P: So did anyone else's parents or grandparents teach you any playing (instrument) or singing?

Student F: No! They only told us stories.

This proposed gap may ultimately be a consequence of the introduction of Christianity in the late 18th Century, which brought enlightenment for the Christian Karen along with education. Christianity replaced traditional beliefs and rituals, however, as they posed a threat to the foundation of the new faith. Secondly, the Karen revolution that began in 1949 resulted in political instability. This brought a social threat to the Karen people regarding human rights abuses and genocide, resulting in physical and psychological displacement. Consequently, the displacement and politically charged diasporic state of the Karen people in Burma

and along the Thai-Burma border have had a profound impact on the interruption of cultural transmission.

Student motivation

Student motivation for the preservation and maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance is qualitatively measured by their responses to the interview questions. Motivation is classified two ways: motivation to attend the workshops and motivation for maintenance of tradition. The study shows both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. First, motivation to maintain tradition is the primary desire of all Karen youth. In Australia Karen students believe that maintenance is vital and there is an intensification of awareness of the need to maintain cultural practices, including the indigenous music and dance:

Student K: I now realised how important and valuable our Karen culture and tradition is because we are not living in our own country. We are Karen and we are not other race. So if we don't maintain our own culture then who else will do it for us?

Motivation is related to fear of the loss of identity and in this context, Karen nationalist identity. The Karen people dream of their own nation, land, culture, language, and other entities. The student participants are part of the Karen 'imagined' community (see Anderson, 1983) and they share this view of an actual Karen nation. Karen people identify with this 'imagined' nation through the previous ownership of the land, which has been taken away from them by the dominant Burmen:

Student E: Karen people are a group of people, a nationality; we have our own culture, history, language, and dress. Our ancestors used to own the land and we are now in another country, and maintaining our culture is the only way we can keep our identity alive.

Some students had no prior knowledge of the Karen indigenous culture and their motivation to attend the workshop was to explore and discover what Karen music is. Therefore, the workshops and the study more generally provided an opportunity for these students to learn about their cultural background. Student F describes her experience of the workshops:

I know myself as Karen. However I never group up among the Karen people, and I don't know how to love or find out about our culture and traditional heritage. Now I have had an opportunity to learn about the Karen traditional and cultural music and dance at the workshops.

Student motivation is also influenced by imagining oneself as a practitioner of indigenous music through playing instruments. Some had considerable interests in the various instruments brought to the workshop and it was disappointing for them to not have the opportunity to learn repertoire or at least some instrumental skills:

Student C: Like everyone here, I imagined that I would be learning to play *tana* and *ta pu* and other instruments but I realised that it was not the case. However, I understand because we don't have enough time and resources therefore the teachers could not deliver it.

This study reveals that the limitations of time and resources such as instruments had a considerable impact on the motivation of the students. Even though students were disappointed with some content of the workshops, they were excited to have acquired and learnt new cultural knowledge as well as the basic *don* dance movements.

While students were motivated to participate in the workshop as well as having a strong desire to maintain Karen indigenous music and dance culture, a question regarding their commitment to the transmission emerged. For the student participants, life in the refugee camps prevented them from pursuing their educational goals as well as establishing a livelihood. As they resettle in Australia, they face the challenges of the Australian ways of living, while holding on to the Karen ways of living. Student C is an enthusiast in Karen cultural maintenance and he expressed his concern:

Actually, I am very interested and motivated to learn but our situation now is that we don't have enough time and resources and a place. But when people play *tana* and blow instruments, I really enjoy listening to it and would like to learn it. I just don't have the time to catch up with my interests.

Religious and sub-ethnic sensitivities affecting motivation among the students

Responses from the interviews also revealed that religious and sub-ethnic issues relating to the transmission and practices of indigenous music and dance created concerns among the students and affected their motivation. Living in the refugee camps, Christian children or youth were not exposed to certain cultural practices due

to religious associations with traditional belief systems as well as Buddhism. While cultural maintenance and transmission within the refugee camps existed, students (of this study) did not participate nor attend the learning workshops:

Student J: There are people teaching this [indigenous music and dance – perhaps *Pwo*-specific] but they are [Buddhists] so we didn't go.

Students' disassociation with the cultural practices within the refugee camps is also influenced by the fear of the 'old practices', more specifically, the associations of certain cultural practices such as the wrist tying ceremony with traditional belief systems and Buddhism. Several students expressed their anxiety about learning the *don* dance prior to the workshop, as they previously had chosen not to associate with the dance genre in the refugee camps:

Student F: Majority of Buddhists are *Moe Hti* [*Pwo* Karen], not *Ba Hti* [*Sgaw* Karen]. Normally people who dance *don* are *Moe Hti* and they worship monks [that is, are Buddhist]. And they used to say that if they don't offer to the spirits then their dances cannot go smoothly and this is their taking. But for us Christians, it is not like that.

Student K: In the camp, what I had normally seen is that before they dance *don*, they give offerings to the spirits then they start teaching. And they have to invite the spirits for the dance competitions and after the competition then, they have to release them. So when you said we are going to learn *don* dance, I was shocked because we are Christians and if they (the teachers) give offerings then we shouldn't participate in the dance. But then you said it is not like that and it was true when I attended. At the workshop, it was not like how Buddhists practised [in Australia, inviting spirits is not practised], it was only for the cultural reason so when we came to learn it I was relieved. If it were in the camp, I would have never participated – I would not even watch it. But I did attend these ceremonies for general knowledge purposes.

Upon reflection and realisation of this issue regarding the *don* dance, it is clear that the dance component, which involves inviting spirits, has been eliminated in the Australian context. Even though cultural and authentic significance for the dance practice has been affected, a result is that the *don* dance is now widely accepted by the whole Karen population (that is, including *Sgaw* and *Pwo* Karen). Regardless of students' prior concerns regarding dance practices, they had realised and accepted the cultural significance of the dance genre, particularly in the Australian context.

Learning style: process of transmission

Students approached the learning in a positive and engaged manner and some students were deeply involved in discussions regarding the cultural background. As described, the teaching and learning process in the workshop featured modeling and imitation. During the workshops, students imitated and followed the teachers' lead in the dance steps. The dance learning was approached by trial and error through repetition. The culture bearers taught differently to each other and for the *don* choreography, Teacher D taught the dance without any verbal instruction.

Field observation from the workshops revealed that students responded differently to different teachers. Gender and also a generational gap between teachers determined somewhat the student responses to the teaching and to specific teachers. Through instrumental demonstrations, students had opportunities to explore firsthand various instruments although without proper instruction from Mahn Ta Kaw Wah regarding how to make the correct sound (for example, blowing techniques for the *pi bhar*, *taruu* and *kwe*). Basic *don* practices also revealed that students were 'learning' by imitating the 'teacher'.

During Teacher E's demonstration of *tana*, selected students experimented with *tana* playing techniques, involving hands-on instruction from the teacher (see figure 4.11 above). This learning environment is significant since it shows a more intimate 'learning circle'. Students felt comfortable and less constrained. Comparing Mahn Ta Kaw Wah and Teacher E in particular, it could be seen that students had a more distant relationship with the cultural expert. In contrast, Teacher E was a 'friendlier elder brother' for the student participants. As one of the leaders from the same youth organisation with which the students are associated, Teacher E is also respected due to his humble nature.

Preference towards particular teachers was not openly displayed or verbalised by the students. However on at least one occasion the gender of the teacher played an important role. Here is a field observation from Workshop Three:

The girls were more enthusiastic since Teacher 4 (a younger attractive female dancer) was now teaching them. Suddenly, the boys felt that they are left out and they felt that they needed a male figure model. When they addressed this to Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, he simply told the boys to follow the girls.

The *don* dance taught by Teacher D was primarily choreography for female dancers consisting of certain feminine hand and body movements. While female students had more motivation to learn the dance under Teacher D, male students had concerns with the appearances of their hands and body movements. They constantly searched for a male model to show them a more masculine approach to the dance. Most of the time, they had no assistant regarding their concern but during Workshop Four, Teacher C assisted by modeling the male dancing style for a few minutes. It was insufficient for the male students to learn their parts; ultimately they decided to improvise their own ‘masculine’ dance movements.

Gaining and consolidating personal and cultural values

According to the student participants, the workshop had to some extent provided an opportunity to reflect upon their personal and cultural values. As they had no previous ‘hands-on’ experience of transmission of Karen indigenous music and dance prior to this study, it allowed the student participants to imagine themselves as future culture bearers. For example, Student M joyfully reported:

After the workshops, I felt good! When I blew the *kwe*, I imagined myself back home (in Burma) playing *kwe* among the shrubs in the hills. I realised that I can do it [that is, maintain culture]. I can be ‘someone’ [that is, make a contribution] for our people.

A simple act of blowing *kwe* allows the student to project the ‘imagined’ self and the dream of the Karen people, that is, anticipate a day of freedom from all the oppression committed against the Karen. Intrinsically, students feel that maintaining culture, including music and dance, is part of the healing process from past experiences as well as a means of participating in the Karen people’s struggle.

Extrinsically, students feel a sense of pride and a strengthening of self-esteem regarding Karen cultural identity. The workshop provided a sense of belonging and a context where they could relate to their personal and cultural identity:

Student D: Normally I am a very shy person. I would have never participated in any cultural stuff [Karen indigenous music and dance practices]. In the beginning of the workshops, I was shy about participating in it. After a while, I realised that I no longer feel insecure about our culture ... I learnt so many things and I am proud of it.

Student N: At school [here in Australia], we have a Flag Day event where different cultural groups within the school present various cultural performances. This year we will be doing a bamboo dance and I feel so proud to have a chance to share our culture with other people.

In multicultural Australia, in general, transmission and maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance is a justification for not only keeping Karen identity alive within the community but also for prompting Karen youth to take responsibility in sharing its value and beauty among the rest of the world's cultures. Cultural identity becomes a form of advocacy in telling the Karen story of struggle and oppression, but also of hope, to the rest of the world.

Conclusion: reflections on an unexpected outcome

Initially, the outcomes of workshops were disappointing in terms of actual performance skills acquired and repertoires learnt. Upon reflection and consideration of the data however, the real outcome of the research project was its symbolic value to the participants and the researcher. The workshops turned out to be a necessary first step for what must follow. They clearly provided the context for the study and brought out specific significant issues relating to the Karen people and their diasporic ethnic identity. Means of pedagogy, while important, turned out to be less significant to the study than was originally thought. The symbolic importance of the workshops to the participants and members of the wider Karen community outweighed the actual musical outcomes of the workshops.

The outcomes reveal that throughout the course of the study, the researcher sensed that there was more emphasis placed on Karen unity than on music and dance maintenance and transmission. The study subconsciously promoted Karen unity despite differences it highlighted in language, culture, costume, religion, and political

views. During the lecture from workshop one, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah stated in his opening speech:

As Karen people, it is our duty to maintain our culture and identity alive and it is the responsibility of all Karen, both *Sgaw* and *Pwo*.

The emphasis on unity was also represented through the teaching and learning of the *don* dance. Inevitably the dance is bound to sub-ethnic and religious specific differences yet it struggles and is determined to promote unity; the meaning of *don* is, “to be in agreement” (MacLachlan, 2006 p. 26).

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study trialled and assessed the viability of the transmission and maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance in a non-formal Australian context. Through the design of a five-workshop model that established a transmission context for the purposes of the project, the researcher ultimately discovered that the study raised more questions and complex issues than it provided pedagogical solutions to questions of transmission and maintenance in a diasporic context. It became evident that the symbolic significance of this study surpassed the immediate, practical significance. The findings nevertheless yield valuable insight into the research area of transmission and maintenance of Karen endangered indigenous music and dance practices. The research findings are summarised in three sections: description and discussion of content of the workshops, involvement and views of culture bearers, and evaluations and responses of student participants.

Summary of findings

The workshops were designed as part of an action research project to investigate whether they could provide Karen youth in Sydney with substantial music and dance knowledge and performance skills. The planning of the workshops was affected considerably by the availability at a time required by the study of culture bearers and in particular, a cultural expert. Organising and planning necessitated strict consultation between Karen cultural experts, Karen community leaders and elders in Sydney, student participants, and the Auburn council for the venue. The contents of the workshops were not systematically programmed (from a Western perspective); therefore, for the duration of study each workshop was affected by last-minute changes. However, the content was adapted to the nature of the workshop design (that is, teaching a group of students in a short period of time, aspects of practices that would normally require a lifetime of individual, ongoing learning). Practical limitations such as transportation also had an impact on the venue for the workshops.

The workshops did provide a 'non-formal Australian' context where limited time and resources were to significantly restrict the transmission process. The workshop

content included demonstrations of musical instruments (indigenous and introduced) used by Karen people, basic *don* dance movements, *don* repertoire choreography, a *don* song to accompany the dance, and a demonstration on singing *htas*. Culture bearers including the cultural expert, Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, mainly employed modeling and imitation as the primary teaching technique for the *don* dance. Close observation of the workshops revealed that students participated in a positive and engaging manner even though they had differing preconceptions of the workshops (learning individual instruments, for example).

Involving cultural experts within the study revealed information regarding Karen traditional transmission processes and about contexts in which they acquired cultural knowledge through indigenous music and dance. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to compare and analyse various different transmission contexts: traditional transmission, transmission within the refugee camps, and transmission within Australia. The culture bearers employed the ‘unspoken’ teaching and learning approach they experienced during their childhood. Certain approaches were modified for the non-formal context and were generally more formal compared with the traditional approach – the lecture in Workshop One, for example.

While indigenous music and dance practices co-existed independently of each other in Burma, some *Sgaw* sub-ethnic groups did not accept *Pwo*-specific culture, music, and dance practices within the refugee camps. In the Australian context, however, as a minority group, the cultural plurality of Karen indigenous music and dance has been replaced by a unified projection of Karen cultural identity, that is, with all Karen sharing cultural practices regardless of whether they are specific to *Pwo* or *Sgaw* Karen. Consequently, the study brought out in the open some religious, social, political and sub-ethnic sensitivities surrounding the involvement of the culture bearers. Mahn Ta Kaw Wah, the Karen cultural expert, faced substantial dilemmas in approaching the workshop project, having to take into account differences between community organisations, students’ personal motivations, and students’ religious, social and sub-ethnic backgrounds.

Karen youth in Australia had little or no prior experience in participating in hands-on indigenous music and dance practices. This is due to the interruption of the generational transmission caused primarily by the introduction of Christianity in the late 1800s, as well as the nature of the displaced Karen refugees along the Thai-Burma border. After establishing a new life in Australia, student participants face the challenge of balancing a desire to nurture a Karen cultural identity with a desire to live the Australian way of life (that is, keeping up with educational or employment pursuits that they had been denied while living in the refugee camps).

Student participants were intrinsically and extrinsically motivated by a strong desire to participate in cultural maintenance as well as learning practical indigenous music and dance skills and repertoires. As a minority group and the realisation for the future of Karen abroad, students felt the responsibility and the urge to maintain Karen cultural identity for fear of losing it in the host 'third' country. While having some prior concerns regarding sensitive religious affiliations with certain cultural practices, the workshops provided students with a different perspective on the *don* dance genre. They experienced growth in personal and cultural values. As a result, they became better-informed individuals regarding maintenance of their culture, developing a pride for sharing their indigenous music and dance culture while at the same time advocating to the world on behalf of the 'untold' Karen story.

Recommendation for the Karen community

Having gone through the process of designing and delivering the workshops, the researcher gained a better understanding of the meaning of cultural maintenance for Sydney Karen. For the continuation of maintenance and transmission to occur, there must be ongoing learning within the community, which is fully supported by the whole the community. Full commitment is required from culture bearers, experts and teachers, and most importantly, from the Karen youth themselves. Positive relationships between learners and teachers must be established. Trust and close relationship between the two parties is extremely important for ongoing transmission. There must be an open dialogue in the Karen community regarding how to reconcile time and other demands, including sensitive social, political and religious issues, from the students and their families as well as the culture bearers and experts.

Despite the challenges, such open dialogue in the Karen community is necessary in order to address differences in order for true maintenance and transmission to take place.

Practical and logistical limitations had a great impact on the project. Therefore, community organisations, such as the Australian Karen Cultural Organisation, Australian Karen Organisation and Karen Youth Organisation – Australia must have support from and relationships with the local council departments for the availability of centrally located venues and other resources. For individual instrumental learning, students must be able to attain personal instruments either custom built in Australia or imported from overseas.

Funding (either from community contributions or through government grants) for such projects are essential for logistical purposes as well as funding for the cultural experts and culture bearers as a mean of showing appreciation and respect, thus subsidising the current voluntary nature of teaching and learning.

Recommendation for further research

This study is the first piece of academic research on the Australian transmission and maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance. The study focused on a small group of students and culture bearers in Western Sydney and the study was influenced by the geographical context in which it exists. At a major level, further research is required to examine the geographical and periodical fields of transmission and maintenance as Karen people continue to disperse in many third countries including Europe, New Zealand, Thailand and United States of America and Canada. Even within Australia, a multi-case study of Karen people from various states and territories would be valuable.

This study focused primarily on the workshops and the participants; therefore examination of the involvement of other Karen community members as well as schools with a high Karen student population should be addressed in further research.

It would be interesting to analyse some of the educational implications within the school system of supporting the transmission and maintenance of Karen indigenous music and dance.

Further detailed case study analyses of music and dance genres from diverse Karen sub-ethnic groups, such as East *Pwo*, West *Pwo*, East *Sgaw*, West *Sgaw*, *Karenni*, *Padung*, *Bwe*, and at a general level, hill and lowland Karen, need to be undertaken to gain a better understanding of the state of the indigenous culture in the 21st Century. To gain a broader understanding of the indigenous music and dance maintenance and transmission of the Karen people of Burma, scholars as well as future researchers are encouraged to contribute to building the current small body of literature on the music and dance of the Karen people of Burma.

Conclusion: “Where there’s a will, there’s a way”

This study reveals that cultural maintenance is part of nurturing Karen identity and looking forward to and being ready for the Karen ‘imagined’ community (Anderson, 1983). Findings from this research as well as the literature indicates that there is certainly an increase in awareness and a move toward maintenance in the refugee camps, as well as in the third countries. The online opinion poll result on the Drum Publication Group website (a Karen community based organization that promotes education and cultural preservation of Burmese cultures), indicates that more than 80 percent of its participants believe that Karen cultural preservation and maintenance is flourishing (<http://www.drumpublications.org/index.html>).

A Karen friend of mine often used to say, “Where there’s a will, there’s a way!” On this note I would like to conclude with the proposal that it is we, the Karen youth, who are responsible for the maintenance and preservation of our Karen cultural identity and for ‘dreaming’ our ‘imagined’ community despite our differences and the distance between us across the global Karen diaspora.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter



The University of Sydney

Human Research Ethics Committee

Web: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/ethics/human>

ABN 15 211 513 464

Gail Briody
Manager
Office of Ethics Administration

Marietta Coutinho
Deputy Manager
Human Research Ethics Administration

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Level 6
Jane Foss Russell Building – G02
The University of Sydney
NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA

Ref: DC/AP

12 February 2009

Associate Professor K Marsh
Sydney Conservatorium of Music
C41
The University of Sydney
Email: kmarsh@usyd.edu.au

Dear Professor Marsh

Thank you for your correspondence dated 26 January 2009 addressing comments made to you by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). After considering the additional information, the Executive Committee at its meeting on **6 February 2009** approved your protocol entitled **"Karen traditional music learning in an Australian context as an alternative approach to cultural preservation"**.

Details of the approval are as follows:

Ref No.:	02-2009/11487
Approval Period:	February 2009 to February 2010
Authorised Personnel:	Associate Professor K Marsh Mr P Htoo

The HREC is a fully constituted Ethics Committee in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans-March 2007* under Section 5.1.29

The approval of this project is **conditional** upon your continuing compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*. We draw to your attention the requirement that a report on this research must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed.

Special Condition of Approval:

Please provide certified translations of all public documents.

Chief Investigator / Supervisor's responsibilities to ensure that:

- (1) All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.
- (2) All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.
- (3) The HREC must be notified as soon as possible of any changes to the protocol. All changes must be approved by the HREC before continuation of the research project. These include:-
 - If any of the investigators change or leave the University.
 - Any changes to the Participant Information Statement and/or Consent Form.
- (4) All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. The Participant Information Statement and Consent Form are to be on University of Sydney letterhead and include the full title of the research project and telephone contacts for the researchers, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee and the following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Statement. *Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney, on (02) 8627 8175 (Telephone); (02) 8627 8180 (Facsimile) or gbridy@usyd.edu.au (Email).*
- (5) Copies of all signed Consent Forms must be retained and made available to the HREC on request.
- (6) It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.
- (7) The HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the Approval Period stated in this letter. Investigators are requested to submit a progress report annually.
- (8) A report and a copy of any published material should be provided at the completion of the Project.

Yours sincerely



**Professor D I Cook
Chairman
Human Research Ethics Committee**

cc: Mr Peter Htoo; Email: phto2746@usyd.edu.au

Encl. Approved Participant Consent Form (Traditional Music Teacher – English version)
Approved Participant Information Statement (Traditional Music Teacher – English version)

Approved Participant Information Statement (Non-professional Traditional Musician or
Dancer – English version)
Approved Participant Information Statement (Student Participants and Parents – English
version)
Approved Parental (or Guardian) Consent Form (English version)
Approved Advertisement (English version)
Approved Participant Consent Form (English version)
Approved Interview Questions (English version)

Appendix B: Promotional Material



- Are you interested in Karen Traditional Music?
- Are you passionate about preserving Karen musical culture?
- Would you like to learn about Karen traditional music and attend workshops?

If you answer “yes” to any of the questions and would like to find out more.....

Contact:
Peter Htoo
Mobile: 0421652595
Email:
phto2746@usyd.edu.au



Appendix C: Participant Information Statement for Teacher

SYDNEY CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC



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Chair of Music Education

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Sydney NSW 2006 Australia
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Telephone: + 61 2 9351 1333
Facsimile: + 61 2 9351 1287
Email: kmarsh@usyd.edu.au
Web: www.usyd.edu.au/

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT (for the Traditional Music Teacher) Research Project

Title: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

(1) What is the study about?

This study aims to investigate how traditional Karen music can be preserved through studying the participants' interaction within the traditional music learning experience in a community centre.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Peter Htoo and will form the basis for the degree of Bachelor of Music (Music Education) (Honours) at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh, Chair of Music Education, Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves five two-hour traditional music learning workshops where notes will be taken by the researcher while being a part of the learning process. As the traditional music teacher, you are kindly requested to provide a traditional music learning experience for the Karen youths in Sydney mainly consisting of vocal repertoires as well as some instrumental music. You may also include information on the Karen historical and cultural knowledge for the student participants. At the completion of the workshops, you, the teacher, will be interviewed regarding traditional music teaching and learning methods and your perception of the workshops as an alternative approach to cultural preservation. The workshops will be video and audio-taped and the interview will be audio-taped.

(4) How much time will the study take?

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 1 of 2

Version [2, 26^h January 2009]



The workshops will be conducted over five weekends on Saturdays, in the beginning of February 2009. Individual and/or group interviews will be conducted at the conclusion of the five workshops. The interview will take approximately one hour.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researchers, the Karen Youth Organisation, the Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church or the University of Sydney.

During the interview, you may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

A report of the study may be submitted for publication. In the report, you may be identified through the use of pseudonyms or if you request, your true identity will be disclosed. All other aspects of the study, including results and the identities of the student participants and non-professional musicians and dancers, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants except as required by law.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

This study may not directly be beneficial to you.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you may.

(9) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Peter Htoo will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Peter Htoo (0421652596) Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh (Tel: 9351 1333).

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or gbriody@usyd.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 2 of 2

Version [2, 26^h January 2009]

Appendix D: Participant Information Statement for Non-Professional Traditional Musician and Dancer

SYDNEY CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC



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Telephone: + 61 2 9351 1333
Facsimile: + 61 2 9351 1287
Email: kmarsh@usyd.edu.au
Web: www.usyd.edu.au/

Participant Information Statement (for the Non-professional traditional musician or dancer) Research Project

Title: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

(1) What is the study about?

This study aims to investigate how traditional Karen music can be preserved through studying the participants' interaction within the traditional music learning experience in a community centre.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Peter Htoo and will form the basis for the degree of Bachelor of Music (Music Education) (Honours) at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh, Chair of Music Education, Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves five two-hour traditional music learning workshops where notes will be taken by the researcher while being a part of the learning process. As a non-professional traditional musician or dancer, you are kindly requested to provide assistance in demonstration of traditional music or dance repertoires during the workshop by prior arrangements made with the teacher. At the completion of the workshops, you will be interviewed regarding your previous experience in traditional music learning and practices and your perception of the workshops as an alternative approach to cultural preservation. The workshops will be video and audio-taped and the interview will be audio-taped.

(4) How much time will the study take?

The workshops will be conducted over five weekends on Saturdays, in the beginning of February 2009. Individual and/or group interviews will be

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 1 of 2

Version [2, 26^h January 2009]



conducted at the conclusion of the five workshops. The interview will take approximately one hour.

(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researchers, the Karen Youth Organisation, the Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church or the University of Sydney.

During the interview, you may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants except as required by law. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

This study may not be directly beneficial to you.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you may.

(9) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Peter Htoo will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Peter Htoo (0421652596) Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh (Tel: 9351 1333).

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or gbriody@usyd.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 2 of 2

Version [2, 26th January 2009]

Appendix E: Participant Information Statement for The Student Participants and Parents

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Participant Information Statement (for the Student Participants and parents) Research Project

Telephone: + 61 2 9351 1333
Facsimile: + 61 2 9351 1287
Email: kmarsh@usyd.edu.au
Web: www.usyd.edu.au/

Title: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

(1) What is the study about?

This study aims to investigate how traditional Karen music can be preserved through studying the participants' interaction within the traditional music learning experience in a community centre.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by Peter Htoo and will form the basis for the degree of Bachelor of Music (Music Education) (Honours) at The University of Sydney under the supervision of Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh, Chair of Music Education, Sydney Conservatorium of Music.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study involves five two-hour traditional music learning workshops where notes will be taken by the researcher while being a part of the learning process. The student participant will be experiencing traditional music learning which mainly consists of vocal repertoires and some instrumental music. He/she will also learn about Karen history and culture from the teacher. Selected participants will be interviewed individually or in group at the conclusion of the workshops. The workshops will be video and audio-taped and the interviews will be audio-taped.

(4) How much time will the study take?

The workshops will be conducted over five weekends on Saturdays, in the beginning of February 2009. Individual and/or group interviews will be conducted at the conclusion of the five workshops. The interview will take approximately one hour.

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 1 of 2

Version [2, 26^h January 2009]



(5) Can I withdraw from the study?

Being in this study is completely voluntary - you are not under any obligation to consent and - if you do consent - you can withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher/s, the Karen Youth Organisation, the Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church or the University of Sydney. You may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

For the parents:

Your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate will not prejudice you or your child's future relations with the University of Sydney. If you decide to permit your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue your child's participation at any time without affecting your relationship with the University of Sydney.

(6) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants except as required by law. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

(7) Will the study benefit me?

This study may benefit you as it provides an opportunity to experience Karen traditional music in a community learning environment.

(8) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you may.

(9) What if I require further information?

When you have read this information, Peter Htoo will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Peter Htoo (0421652596) or Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh (Tel: 9351 1333).

(10) What if I have a complaint or concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or gbriody@usyd.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep

Appendix F: Participant Consent Form

SYDNEY CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC



Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh
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Email: kmarsh@usyd.edu.au
Web: www.usyd.edu.au

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I,[PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in the research project

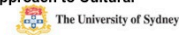
TITLE: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.
3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s), the Karen Youth Organisation, the Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church or the University of Sydney now or in the future.
4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.
5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 1 of 2



Version [2, 26^h January 2009]



6. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the audio/video recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

7. I consent to:

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| i) Audio-taping | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii) Video-taping | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii) Receiving Feedback | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered YES to the "Receiving Feedback Question (iii)", please provide your details i.e. mailing address, email address.

Feedback Option

Address: _____

Email: _____

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix G: Parental (or Guardian) Consent Form

SYDNEY CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC



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Email: kmarsh@usyd.edu.au
Web: www.usyd.edu.au/

PARENTAL (OR GUARDIAN) CONSENT FORM

I, agree to permit, who is
aged years, to participate in the research project –

**TITLE: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as
an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation**

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. I have read the Information Statement and the time involved for my child's participation in the project. The researcher/s has given me the opportunity to discuss the information and ask any questions I have about the project and they have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study at any time without prejudice to myself or my child's relationship with the researcher/s, the Karen Youth Organisation, the Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church, or the University of Sydney now or in the future.
3. I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study may be published provided that neither my child nor I can be identified.
4. I understand that if I have any questions relating to my child's participation in this research I may contact the researcher/s who will be happy to answer them.
5. I acknowledge receipt of the Information Statement.
6. I consent my child to:

i) Audio-taping (for the interview & workshops)

YES NO

ii) Video-taping (for the workshop)

YES NO

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 1 of 2



Version [2, 26^h January 2009]



.....
Signature of Parent/Guardian

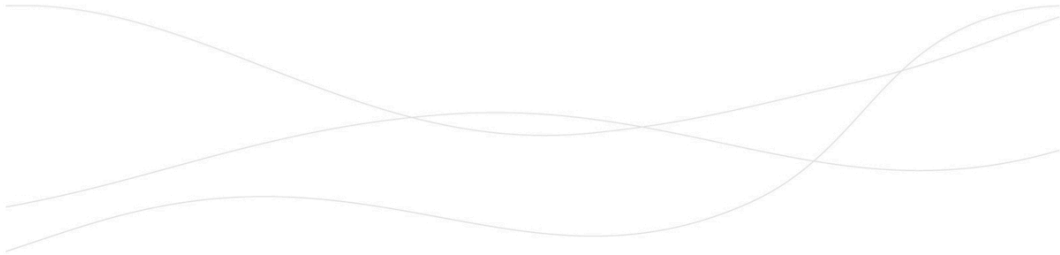
.....
Please PRINT name

.....
Date

.....
Signature of Child

.....
Please PRINT name

.....
Date



Appendix H: Participant Consent Form for Traditional Music Teacher

SYDNEY CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC



Associate Professor Kathryn Marsh
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Facsimile: + 61 2 9351 1287
Email: kmarsh@usyd.edu.au
Web: www.usyd.edu.au

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Traditional Music Teacher)

I,[PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in the research project

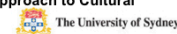
TITLE: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.
3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s), the Karen Youth Organisation, the Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church or the University of Sydney now or in the future.
4. I understand that my identity will be disclosed through the use of pseudonyms or my true identity will be revealed at my request in the final report.
5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation

Page 1 of 2



Version [2, 26^h January 2009]



6. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the audio/video recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

7. I consent to:

- | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| i) Audio-taping | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii) Video-taping | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii) Receiving Feedback | YES | <input type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you answered YES to the "Receiving Feedback Question (iii)", please provide your details i.e. mailing address, email address.

Feedback Option

Address: _____

Email: _____

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix I: Interview Question Outline

Semi-Structured Interview Question Outline

For the traditional teacher

1. In what ways, did you learn traditional music back in Burma?
2. Describe the traditional music learning as experienced by you when you first started learning Karen music.
3. What was your motivation to learn traditional music?
4. What qualities must a person have to learn traditional music?
5. Is knowing about the historical and cultural context of Karen music vital in the learning process? If so outline some of the historical and cultural knowledge that you would like to share.
6. What is your opinion on the preservation of Karen traditional music in Australia?
7. How do you think this study will contribute as an alternative approach to the preservation of the Karen traditional music through non-formal music learning context?
8. How do you perceive yourself as a traditional music teacher in general?
9. How would you perceive yourself as a traditional music teacher to the students in the workshop?
10. How would you comment on the dynamic of the workshop?
11. What is your opinion of transmitting traditional music to the next generation?
12. What are the factors and issues surrounding the lack of traditional music teaching in Australia?

For the students

1. What is your preferred choice of music genre?
2. What instruments do you play and the type of genres that you perform?
3. Have you had prior knowledge about the Karen traditional music or have you previously had any Karen traditional musical experience? If no, what factors made you unaware or have little knowledge of the Karen music at this point in life?
4. What factors impact on your motivation or lack of motivation in learning the traditional music?
5. How do you feel about preserving traditional music?
6. How would you evaluate the traditional learning process?
7. What significant learning did you have after participating in the workshops?
8. How do you perceive yourself in terms of self-identity or self-esteem after participating in the traditional music learning experience?
9. What personal and/or cultural values have you gained through the workshops?
10. Provide any suggestion as a Karen youth who is interested in maintaining the cultural heritage such as music.

Peter Htoo: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation.

For the non-professional musicians and dancers

1. In what ways, did you learn traditional music back in Burma?
2. Describe the traditional music learning as experienced by you when you first started learning Karen music.
3. What was your motivation to learn traditional music?
4. How often are you involved in traditional music making here in Australia?
5. How do you perceive yourself as a non-professional musician or dancer?
6. What is your opinion on how to preserve traditional music?

Peter Htoo: Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal context
as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation.

Page 2 of 2

Appendix J: Support Letter from Karen Youth Organisation – Australia



KYO ~ AUSTRALIA INC.

Karen Youth Organisation - Australia Inc.

ABN. 12 383 017 127

Date: 10th November 2008

To
Human Research Ethic Committee, University of Sydney

Re: Permission for participation in the research project, "Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation."

It is brought to our attention that Mr. Peter Htoo, a student of the University of Sydney commencing the degree of Bachelor of Music (Music Education), has requested the members of Karen Youth Organisation to participate in his proposed research project.

It is our interest and belief that the research project would benefit greatly to the Karen youths of this organisation through the traditional music learning experience. Therefore this organisation would like to express its support through the approval of our member participation in the project.

If you wish to enquire further on this matter, you may contact me, Mr. Eh Taw Ray by my email, ehtawray@yahoo.com.au.

Yours truly,



Mr. Eh Taw Ray
President
Karen Youth Organisation, Australia

PO Box 235 Guildford NSW 2161
Phone/Fax; +61297880530
Email: kyo.australia@gmail.com

Appendix K: Support Letter from Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church



ပပ်အိုင်ယွကညီဘျာထံခရံင်ဖိတင်အိုင်ဖိုင် ~ ဝှ်စူးနံင်ကီင်အီးစဝ်ဂ့လယါ
EXALT THE LORD KAREN BAPTIST CHURCH ~ SYDNEY AUSTRALIA INC.

INC.No.9886697

To
Human Research Ethic Committee, University of Sydney

RE: Permission for participation in the research project, "Karen Traditional Music Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context as an Alternative Approach to Cultural Preservation."

Date: 10th November 2008

Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church is aware that Mr. Peter Htoo is completing his Bachelor of Music (Music Education) degree at University of Sydney and is also commencing with his honours research.

We represent our church members, all of whom are of Karen background. Since his research requires members of the Karen youth from Exalt The Lord Karen Baptist Church, we would like to extend our assistance by providing full permission for the Karen youths to participate in his research project.

For further enquires, you may contact me, Rev. Anthony Taw, or the church secretary Naw Hay Blu Paw.

Yours truly,

Church Pastor
Rev. Anthony Taw

P.O. Box 642 Merrylands, NSW, 2160 Australia
Tel / Fax (612) 9723 2468
Email: exaltthelordkbc@gmail.com

Appendix L: Letter of Approval from Auburn Council for the Venue



1 Susan Street, P.O. Box 118 Auburn, NSW Australia 1835

Telephone: 9735 1222 Facsimile: 9643 1120

ABN 63 914 691 587

B. Endycott - 9735 1316

In reply quote:

TRIM No: C-37-30

Contact Name:

12 March 2009

Peter Htoo
21 Banaro Ave
WHALAN NSW 2770

Dear Peter,

**SUBJECT: PROJECT SUPORT APPROVAL FOR KAREN TRADITIONAL MUSIC
PROJECT**

I am writing to confirm Auburn Council's support for the Karen Traditional Music Project. As part of Council's commitment to accessible education and lifelong learning, Council will provide you and your students with access to the Newington Community Centre for the following dates and times to run traditional Karen music classes and carry out associated research activities:

- Saturday 4 April 2009, 10am-12pm
- Saturday 11 April 2009, 10am-12pm
- Saturday 18 April 2009, 10am-12pm
- Saturday 25 April 2009, 10am-12pm
- Saturday 2 May 2009, 10am-12pm

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 9735 1316 with any queries or for further information.

Yours faithfully,

BROOKE ENDYCOTT
CDO - RESEARCH AND PROGRAMS

AR BLUETT MEMORIAL AWARD WINNER 2007/08

www.auburn.nsw.gov.au

Email: auburncouncil@auburn.nsw.gov.au